

Smart Stuff

with Twig Walkingstick



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Notes: Wildlife Online is based in the United Kingdom. U.S. spelling: "metabolizing." Hedgehog lactose-intolerance comes up, so to speak, in at least two ways: First, when people raise pet or abandoned wild baby hedgehogs; experts suggest giving them sheep's milk, goat's milk or soy-based formula for human babies instead of cow's milk. Second, people in England sometimes put out bowls of bread and cow's milk to feed wild backyard hedgehogs (which don't live in North America, you might remember). It's a traditional thing. A kind thing. But also, alas, it can give them the wind. "Put out clean water, but never milk," says the Wildlives Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre, U.K.

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Q. Dear Twig: Hedgehogs are lactose-intolerant. I read that in a book. How would anyone know that?

A. I turn to a real good Web site for a simple, two-word answer:

Greenish diarrhoea.

"Greenish diarrhoea," Wildlife Online (<http://www.wildlifeonline.me.uk/>) colorfully points out, "has been documented in captive (hedgehogs) fed on a diet of cow's milk and bread."

And documenting greenish diarrhoea, of course, is something you'd notice and learn from, I bet. Especially if you were the hedgehog. Or a scientist. Or a scientist who was a hedgehog who had greenish diarrhoea.

See, hedgehogs are mammals. And most mammals make less and less **lactase** ("LAK-tase") after weaning — after they stop drinking mother's milk. Lactase is an **enzyme** ("EN-zime"). It breaks down **lactose** ("LAK-tose"), or milk sugar. So a lactase lack leads to **lactose intolerance**. The lactose-lacker can't digest milk.

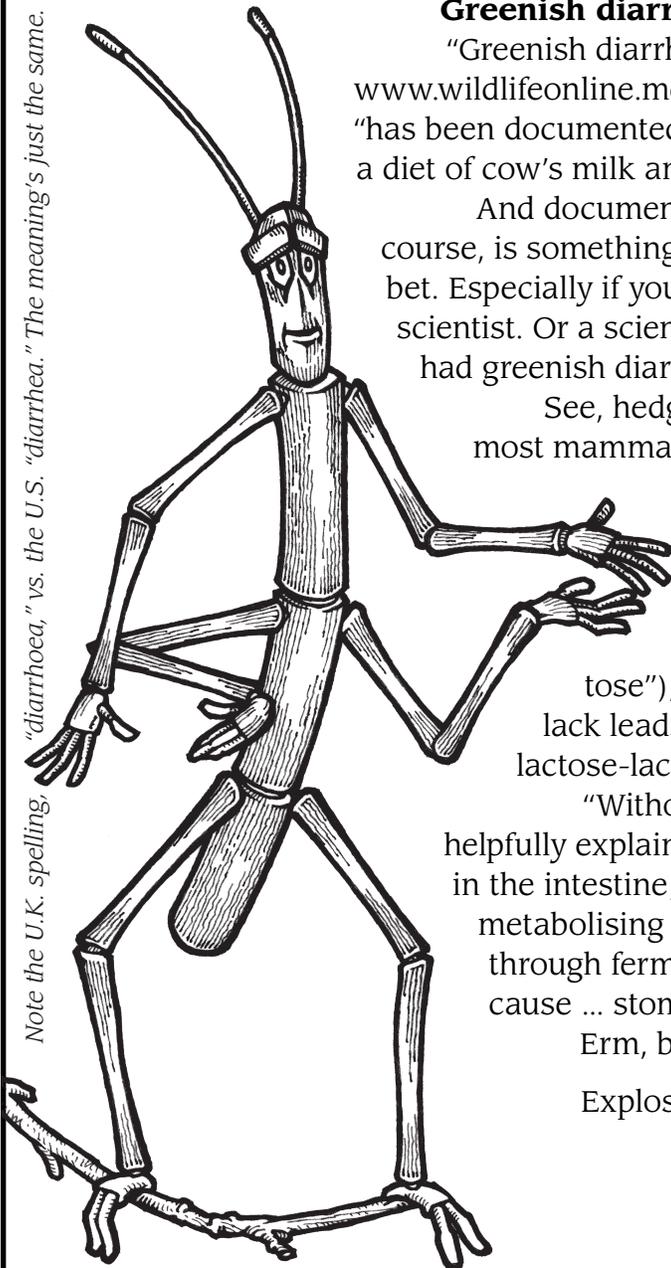
"Without lactase," the same site helpfully explains, "lactose remains undigested in the intestine; gut bacteria can then adapt to metabolising this sugar, producing gas through fermentation. This gas builds up to cause ... stomach cramps and diarrhoea."

Erm, better see Mrs. Tiggy-winkle ...

Explosively,

Twig

Note the U.K. spelling, "diarrhoea," vs. the U.S. "diarrhea." The meaning's just the same.



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