

Celiac Disease

<http://www.familydoctor.org/x1869.xml>

What is celiac disease?

Celiac disease is a disorder that causes problems in your intestines when you eat gluten, which is in wheat, rye, barley and oats. Gluten is like a poison to people with celiac disease, because it damages their intestines.

What does gluten do to people with celiac disease?

Gluten damages the intestines. This damage keeps your body from taking in many of the nutrients in the food you eat. This includes vitamins, calcium, protein, carbohydrates, fats and other important nutrients. Your body can't work well without these nutrients.

How did I get celiac disease?

Celiac disease runs in the family. You inherited the tendency to get this disease from your parents. If 1 member of your family has celiac disease, about 1 out of 10 other members of your family is likely to have it. You may have this tendency for a while without getting sick. Then something like severe stress, physical injury, infection, childbirth or surgery can "turn on" your celiac disease.

What happens to people with celiac disease?

Celiac disease can cause different problems at different times:

- An infant with celiac disease may have abdominal pain and diarrhea (even bloody diarrhea), and may fail to grow and gain weight.
- A young child may have abdominal pain with nausea and lack of appetite, anemia (not enough iron in the blood), mouth sores and allergic dermatitis (skin rash).
- A child could be irritable, fretful, emotionally withdrawn or excessively dependent.
- In later stages, a child may become malnourished, with or without vomiting and diarrhea. This would cause the child to have a large tummy, thin thigh muscles and flat buttocks.
- Teenagers may hit puberty late and be short. Celiac disease might cause some hair loss (a condition called alopecia areata).

What happens in adults with celiac disease?

Adults who begin to be ill with celiac disease might have a general feeling of poor health, with fatigue, irritability and depression, even if they have few intestinal problems. One serious illness that often occurs is osteoporosis (loss of calcium from the bones). A symptom of osteoporosis may be night-time bone pain. About 5% of adults with celiac disease have anemia. Lactose intolerance (problem with foods like milk) is common in patients of all ages with celiac disease. It usually disappears when they follow a gluten-free diet.

Celiac disease sounds really serious! How can I control it?

Celiac disease is serious. Fortunately you can control celiac disease just by not eating any gluten. By following the right diet, you can reverse the damage caused by celiac disease and you'll feel better. But if you "cheat" on your diet, the damage will come back, even if you don't feel sick right away. You'll have to explain your problem and the gluten-free diet to your family members and ask for their support and help. It will take time for you and your family to learn how to avoid gluten in your diet. You can contact one of the celiac support groups listed at the end of this handout. These groups are excellent sources of information and advice. They'll help you find gluten-free foods and good recipes, and give you tips for successfully living with celiac disease.

How can I be sure I have celiac disease?

New blood tests can help your doctor diagnose this disease. It's necessary to have these blood tests before you start a gluten free-diet. If you have dermatitis herpetiformis (an itchy, blistering skin problem), you have celiac disease. The diagnosis can be confirmed with a biopsy (taking a piece of tissue using a thin tube that is put into your intestines). The best confirmation, though, is if your symptoms go away when you follow a strict gluten-free diet.

What resources are there for people with celiac disease?

In these cookbooks, the author, who has celiac disease herself, shares what she has learned about a gluten-free diet. Bette Hagman is the author. The publisher is Henry Holt and Co.

- The Gluten-Free Gourmet: Living Well Without Wheat
- More From the Gluten-Free Gourmet
- The Gluten-Free Gourmet Cooks Fast and Healthy
- Wheat-Free and Gluten-Free with No Fuss and Fat

This book is a general guide to living gluten-free:

- Against the Grain: The Slightly Eccentric Guide to Living Well Without Gluten or Wheat, written by Jax Peters Lowell and published by Henry Holt and Co.

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