

Celiac Disease

Celiac disease is a chronic condition that damages the small intestine and interferes with the absorption of nutrients from food. Individuals with celiac disease are unable to tolerate a protein called gluten, which is found in wheat, rye, barley and some oats.

What Causes Celiac Disease?

When people with celiac disease eat foods containing gluten, the lining of their small intestines becomes inflamed, and they are unable to absorb enough nutrients. Sometimes celiac disease is triggered for the first time following a surgery, viral infection, episode of severe emotional stress, or during pregnancy or childbirth.

Symptoms

Celiac disease can have varying effects on people. Some develop symptoms as children, others as adults. Digestive symptoms may or may not occur. For example, irritability is one of the most common symptoms in children. Celiac disease may also include one or more of the following symptoms:

- Abdominal bloating and pain
- Chronic diarrhea
- Weight loss

- Pale, foul-smelling stool
- Anemia
- Bone weakness
- Behavior changes
- Muscle cramps
- Fatigue
- Delayed growth
- Joint pain
- Seizures
- Tingling numbness in the legs
- Pale sores or ulcers inside the mouth
- Painful skin rash
- Tooth discoloration or loss of enamel
- In females, missed menstrual periods

Treatment

The best treatment for celiac disease is a gluten-free diet, which can prevent most complications caused by the disease. This means avoiding all products that contain wheat, rye, barley or any of their derivatives. This can be difficult, because gluten is found in many processed foods. Fortunately, due to increased awareness of celiac disease, more restaurants

and food manufacturers are offering gluten-free options such as soy, rice and corn.

Maintenance of a strictly gluten-free diet requires considerable diligence on the part of the patient, along with support and knowledge of what constitutes a gluten-free diet by the monitoring physician and by the patient's family and friends. For good self-management, patients must be educated about their food choices and read all food labels carefully.



Did You Know...?

Studies have shown that babies introduced to wheat, barley or rye in the first three months of their lives are five times more likely to develop celiac disease than babies introduced between four and six months of age.