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What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disease characterized by the intolerance of gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, rye and possibly oats. When someone with celiac disease consumes gluten, their immune system responds by damaging or destroying villi (the tiny finger-like protrusions that line the small intestine) in the digestive tract. These villi enable nutrients from food to be absorbed into the bloodstream and even short-term exposure can cause serious symptoms or consequences for someone with celiac disease.

When to See a Doctor

Occasional abdominal distress such as cramping, bloating or diarrhea may result from a number of causes and often resolves on its own. If your symptoms have not resolved within a few days or if they recur, it's time for a thorough evaluation and consultation with a specialist.

Diagnosis and Testing

The best diagnostic "test" for any condition is a thorough exam and consultation with a physician, including a review of personal and family history. In addition, a physician may recommend the following tests or procedures to confirm your celiac disease diagnosis or and/or rule out other possible causes.

- ▶ **Blood tests.** Higher than normal levels of certain antibodies in your blood may indicate celiac disease.
- ▶ **Endoscopy with biopsy.** A visual exam of and tissue sample from your digestive tract can confirm celiac disease and analyze damage (if present) to the villi.

SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE:

- ▶ Abdominal pain or discomfort
- ▶ Anemia
- ▶ Diarrhea
- ▶ Unexplained weight loss

RISK FACTORS INCLUDE:

The specific cause of celiac disease is unknown and an individual's risk for developing the condition may vary.

- ▶ **Genetics:** first degree relative with celiac disease
- ▶ **Medical history of:** autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus and Sjogren syndrome; Addison's disease; Down syndrome; lactose intolerance; thyroid disease; type 1 diabetes

Treatment and Prevention

Celiac disease cannot be prevented, but the symptoms and effects can be reversed and managed with dietary changes. People with celiac disease must follow a life-long gluten-free diet to maintain their health and prevent long-term complications.

Diet and Celiac Disease

Gluten is a protein in wheat, rye and barley. Although it is found mainly in foods, it may also be in everyday products such as medicines, vitamins and skin care products. Newly diagnosed patients should consult their physician and read product labels carefully.

Common products containing gluten are breads, crackers, croutons, pastas, flours, cereal products, cookies, cakes and other baked goods.

DO NOT CONSUME

- ▶ Wheat or products and beverages made with wheat (durum, faro, semolina, bulgur, beer, etc.)
- ▶ Rye
- ▶ Barley or malt barley products (malt flavoring, malt vinegar, etc.)
- ▶ Triticale (a hybrid grain of wheat and rye)

CONSUME (CHECK LABELS CAREFULLY)

- ▶ Cereals made without wheat or barley malt, such as rice or corn cereals
- ▶ Fruits and vegetables
- ▶ Meat, poultry and fish (not breaded or made with regular gravies)
- ▶ Potatoes, rice, corn, beans
- ▶ Milk-based items, such as milk, cream buttermilk, natural yogurt, natural cream cheese, natural cottage cheese and natural sour cream (avoid products with additives, flavors or seasonings, which may be potential gluten sources)
- ▶ Bread items such as pasta or pizza made with alternative grains; alternative grains may include, rice, buckwheat, tapioca, chickpea, almond, potato or corn flours and starches

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