

Celiac Disease Facts

What Is Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease (CD), also known as celiac sprue or gluten-sensitive enteropathy, is a genetically linked autoimmune disorder that can affect both children and adults. When people with celiac disease eat certain grain-based products that contain gluten, it sets off an immune response that causes damage to the small intestine. This, in turn, interferes with the small intestine's ability to absorb nutrients found in food, leading to malnutrition and a variety of other complications.

"Gluten" is the collective term for the amino acid sequences found in wheat, barley, rye and, to a lesser extent, oats, that trigger the immune response.

Who Has Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease is the most common genetic autoimmune disease in the world. This makes celiac disease more common than lupus, rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis, epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, Crohn's disease or cystic fibrosis. Celiac disease is estimated to affect at least 1% of the worldwide population. **Over 3,000,000 people in the US may have celiac disease, but only 150,000 have been diagnosed.**

Celiac disease occurs in:

- 3.9 -12.3% of people with Type 1 Diabetes
- 5 -12% of people with Down syndrome
- 20% of people with collagenous colitis
- 4.5% of first degree relatives of people with Celiac disease

What Is the Impact of Celiac Disease?

The elapsed time from onset of symptoms to celiac disease diagnosis averages 10 years in the US. The Canadian Celiac Health Survey published in 2007 reported the mean delay in diagnosis was 11.7 years.

- Untreated celiac disease increases the risk of cancer 200-300%.
- Untreated celiac disease increases the risk of miscarriage 800-900%.
- 66% of those with celiac disease have osteopenia or osteoporosis.
- 51.4% of those with celiac disease have neurologic disorders
- Healthcare costs per untreated celiac in the US: \$5,000 - \$12,000 annually.
- Total US healthcare cost for all untreated celiacs: \$14.5 - \$34.8 billion annually.

What Are the Symptoms of Celiac Disease?

Over 300 signs, symptoms, associated disorders and complications may result from celiac disease. Some common health problems include:

- Abdominal Pain/Bloating
- Acid Reflux
- Anemia
- Anxiety/Depression
- Arthritis
- Autoimmune Disease
- Behavior Disorders
- Cancers
- Chronic Constipation
- Chronic Diarrhea
- Chronic Fatigue
- Dental Enamel Defects
- Dermatitis Herpetiformis
- Diabetes
- Headache/Migraine
- Heart Disease
- Infertility
- Insomnia
- Irritability
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Malnutrition
- Miscarriage
- Neuropathies
- Osteoporosis/Osteopenia
- Swelling
- Unexplained Weight Gain/Loss

How Is Celiac Disease Diagnosed?

1. Positive celiac panel blood test
2. Positive small bowel biopsy
3. Remission of symptoms on a gluten-free diet

What Is the Treatment for Celiac Disease?

At this time, the only treatment for celiac disease is the commitment to a strict gluten-free lifestyle. This involves removing all wheat, barley, rye, and common oats from the diet. Successful treatment requires both patient education and medical follow-up.

What Is the Prognosis After Diagnosis?

Prompt diagnosis is imperative for the best health outcome. Damage from gluten is cumulative. The earlier gluten is removed from the diet, the less likely health complications will develop. The body quickly returns to health, in most cases, after initiating a strict gluten-free diet.

There is no cure for celiac disease. The gluten-free diet must be maintained for life to achieve optimal health.

Sources:

Center for Disease Control

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