



Celiac Disease (Sprue)

What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease, also called celiac sprue or gluten sensitivity enteropathy, is a chronic disorder in which the body's immune system responds abnormally to gluten, a protein found in rye, wheat, and barley. When people with celiac disease eat gluten, the immune system attacks the small intestine, causing damage to its lining. The damaged small intestine then affects the body's ability to digest and absorb food properly, which results in malabsorption.

The exact cause of celiac disease is still unknown but it appears to occur from an interaction between a person's genes, eating foods with gluten, and other environmental factors.

Celiac disease is rare, affecting an estimated 1% of people worldwide. While it can affect people at any age, it tends to occur in infants between the ages of 8 and 12 months and then again in adults in their 30s and 40s.

While many people have a non-celiac sensitivity to wheat, this is different from celiac disease.

What are Symptoms of Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease affects people differently, with some people having no symptoms at all and others experiencing debilitating symptoms. Even if you have no symptoms, you may not be absorbing nutrients normally, and you may still be experiencing damage to the small intestines.

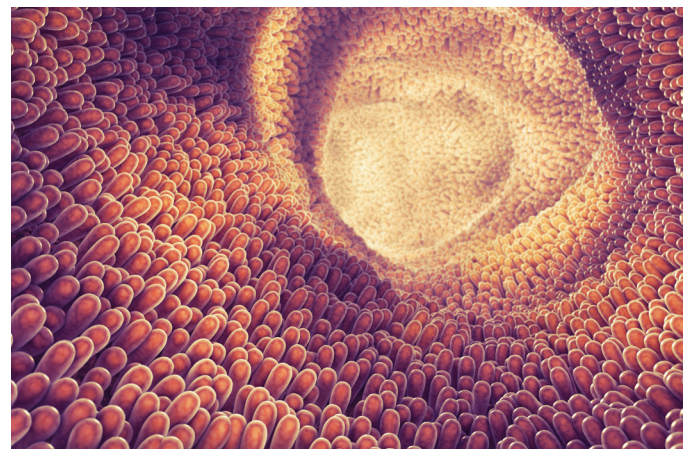
Celiac disease can cause both intestinal and non-intestinal symptoms. The most common signs for adults include:

- Diarrhea (most common symptom)
- Steatorrhea (pale, foul smelling, fatty stools)

- Excessive gas
- Abdominal pain
- Weight loss or failure to grow in children
- Fatigue or weakness

Up to half of adults with celiac disease will experience non-intestinal problems that include:

- Anemia
- Excessive bleeding
- Osteopenia or osteoporosis (weak bones)
- Neurological symptoms (weakness, loss of sensation, numbness or tingling)
- Skin disorders
- Hormonal disorders (lack of menstrual periods, infertility)
- Joint pain



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How is Celiac Disease Diagnosed?

Since celiac disease can affect people in so many different ways and the symptoms can be similar to those of a number of different diseases, it is often difficult to diagnose. If your doctor thinks you could have celiac disease, you will have a blood test to screen for celiac disease antibodies. The most common antibody is called IgA tTG, which can only be tested for if you are currently eating gluten.

If this test is positive, you are usually referred for a biopsy of the small intestine, which is collected during an upper endoscopy procedure. The tissue sample that is collected will be analyzed under a microscope in order to confirm the diagnosis.

How is Celiac Disease Treated?

Celiac disease cannot be cured and there is no medication that you can take to treat it. The only treatment is to remove all gluten from your diet for life. Complete removal of wheat, rye, and barley is necessary but gluten is also added to many processed foods, so these must also be avoided. A visit with a dietician and nutritionist may help you change your diet and adjust to this major lifestyle change. You will also need to see your doctor regularly to be screened for any nutritional deficiencies that could develop. If you do have a deficiency, you will likely be prescribed a gluten-free vitamin or mineral supplement to take until it resolves.

Rarely do people continue to have symptoms despite eating a gluten-free diet. These people are often given a steroid or immunosuppressant to control the symptoms, but only after a full evaluation for other possible causes of the symptoms has been done.

What is the Prognosis of Celiac Disease?

The prognosis for people who are diagnosed early and who respond well to a gluten-free diet is excellent. People who fail to be diagnosed quickly or fail to respond well to a gluten-free diet may experience a poor quality of life and be affected more significantly by conditions related to malabsorption. Because of this, it is important to follow a gluten free diet and to regularly follow up with your doctor.

Where Can You Get More Information About Celiac Disease?

- **Celiac Disease Foundation**
<https://celiac.org/>
- **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics**
<http://www.eatright.org/search.aspx?search=celiac+disease>
- **Beyond Celiac**
<https://www.beyondceliac.org/>
- **National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases**
<https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/digestive-diseases/celiac-disease>