

What I need to know about Celiac Disease



NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH
National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse



U.S. Department
of Health and
Human Services

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What is celiac disease?

Having celiac disease means a person can't eat gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, or barley. Gluten may also be found in some medicines. Celiac disease is hereditary, meaning it runs in families. The treatment for celiac disease is a gluten-free diet. Other names for celiac disease are celiac sprue and gluten intolerance.

In people with celiac disease, the body's immune system responds to gluten by damaging the lining of the small intestine. This lining has small finger-like growths called villi. The villi normally absorb nutrients from the foods we eat. When the villi are damaged, the body can't get the nutrients it needs.

People with celiac disease don't always know they have it because they don't feel sick. Or if they feel sick, they don't know celiac disease is the cause.

Is celiac disease serious?

Yes. Celiac disease can be very serious. Besides stomach pain, it can cause anemia, malnutrition, infertility, a certain skin rash, and other health problems.

What are the symptoms of celiac disease?

Symptoms of celiac disease include

- gas
- diarrhea
- stomach pain
- feeling very tired
- change in mood
- weight loss
- a very itchy skin rash with blisters
- slowed growth

Most people with celiac disease have one or more symptoms, but not all have digestive problems. And some people with the disease don't have any symptoms. Having one or more of these symptoms does not mean a person has celiac disease because many other disorders include these symptoms.

How is celiac disease diagnosed?

Celiac disease can be hard to discover because its symptoms are like many other digestive diseases. People with celiac disease can go untreated for many years.

If your doctor thinks you have celiac disease, you will probably need a blood test. You will need to follow your regular diet before and while being tested. If you don't, the results could be wrong.



If your test results show you might have celiac disease, the doctor will perform a biopsy to make sure celiac disease is the problem. For a biopsy, the doctor takes a small piece of tissue from your small intestine. To get to your small intestine, the doctor puts a long tube into your mouth and down into your stomach. At the end of the tube are small tools for snipping out the bit of tissue needed to view with a microscope. You will take medicine before the biopsy that makes you very sleepy. It also keeps you from feeling any pain. Many people sleep through the procedure.

How is celiac disease treated?

The only treatment for celiac disease is a gluten-free diet. A dietitian can work with you to help you learn how to select gluten-free foods. A dietitian is an expert in food and healthy eating. You will learn to check labels of foods and other items for gluten. If you eliminate gluten from your diet, your small intestine will heal. If you eat gluten, or use items that contain gluten, you will harm your small intestine.

The following chart lists examples of foods you can eat and foods you should stay away from if you have celiac disease. This list is **not** complete. A dietitian can help you learn what other foods you can and can't eat when following a gluten-free diet.



Allowed Foods	
Amaranth	Potatoes
Arrowroot	Quinoa
Buckwheat	Rice
Cassava	Sago
Corn	Seeds
Flax	Soy
Indian rice grass	Sorghum
Job's tears	Tapioca
Legumes	Wild Rice
Millet	Yucca
Nuts	
Foods To Avoid	
Wheat	Barley
• Including einkorn, emmer, spelt, kalmut	Rye
• Wheat starch, wheat bran, wheat germ, cracked wheat, hydrolyzed wheat protein	Triticale (a cross between wheat and rye)
Other Wheat Products	
Bromated flour	Phosphated flour
Duram flour	Plain flour
Enriched flour	Self-rising flour
Farina	Semolina
Graham flour	White flour
Processed Foods that May Contain Wheat, Barley, or Rye*	
Bouillon cubes	Imitation fish
Brown rice syrup	Matzo
Chips/potato chips	Rice mixes
Candy	Sauces
Cold cuts, hot dogs, salami, sausage	Seasoned tortilla chips
Communion wafer	Self-basting turkey
French fries	Soups
Gravy	Soy sauce
	Vegetables in sauce
* Most of these foods can be found gluten-free. When in doubt, check with the food manufacturer.	

Adapted from the following resource: Thompson T. *Celiac Disease Nutrition Guide*. 2nd ed. Chicago: American Dietetic Association; 2006. Used with permission.

Points to Remember

- People with celiac disease can't eat foods or use items with gluten in them.
- Celiac disease harms the small intestine.
- People with untreated celiac disease can't get needed nutrients.
- Without treatment, people with celiac disease can develop other health problems.
- Celiac disease is diagnosed by blood tests and a biopsy of the small intestine.
- A gluten-free diet must be followed for life.
- A dietitian can help people choose the right foods.

Pronunciation Guide

celiac (SEE-lee-ak) **disease** (dih-ZEEZ)

A disease in which people can't eat wheat, rye, or barley because it will damage their small intestine.

dietitian (dy-uh-TISH-un)

An expert in nutrition who helps people plan what and how much food to eat.

small intestine (in-TES-tin)

The part of the body where most foods are broken down.

For More Information

Celiac Disease Awareness Campaign

National Digestive Diseases Information
Clearinghouse

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The Celiac Disease Awareness Campaign

To meet the need for comprehensive and current information about celiac disease, the National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC), a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), launched the Celiac Disease Awareness Campaign. The Awareness Campaign is the result of the combined ideas and efforts of the professional and voluntary organizations that focus on celiac disease, along with the NIDDK, the National Institutes of Health, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Visit www.celiac.nih.gov to learn more about the Awareness Campaign.



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The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC) is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). The NIDDK is part of the National Institutes of Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Established in 1980, the Clearinghouse provides information about digestive diseases to people with digestive disorders and to their families, health care professionals, and the public. The NDDIC answers inquiries, develops and distributes publications, and works closely with professional and patient organizations and Government agencies to coordinate resources about digestive diseases.

Publications produced by the Clearinghouse are carefully reviewed by both NIDDK scientists and outside experts.

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This booklet is also available at www.digestive.niddk.nih.gov.



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Digestive and Kidney Diseases

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