

Celiac Disease

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Celiac disease, also known as celiac sprue or gluten-sensitive enteropathy, is an autoimmune disorder of the small intestine. When people with celiac disease eat products containing gluten, a very common protein found in wheat, rye, barley and many prepared foods, they often experience gastrointestinal symptoms. The symptoms are caused by inflammation and damage of the small

northern European ancestry. It affects as many as one in every 250 people in the United States and possibly more. Celiac disease occurs in both children and adults.

Other conditions associated with celiac disease include osteoporosis, anemia, a skin condition called dermatitis herpetiformis and other autoimmune disorders such as diabetes and thyroid disease. These conditions may occur along with gastrointes-

tinal symptoms, or may be the only sign that celiac disease is present.

So how do we know if a patient has celiac disease? The first step is to carefully evaluate their medical his-

tory and clinical symptoms. Next, a blood test is ordered. A biopsy of the small intestine is then obtained to confirm the disease.

The treatment for celiac sprue is strict adherence to a gluten-free diet, which usually will lead to resolution of symptoms and re-

mission of the disease. This diet can be very difficult to follow for some patients, as gluten is very common in the American diet. Physicians and dieticians will work together with patients who have celiac disease to guide them through balancing their nutritional needs. An added benefit to celiac patients who follow a gluten-free diet is that they lower their risk of developing possible complications of celiac disease, including cancer.

Public awareness of celiac disease is growing, and some manufacturers are responding by labeling some of their products as gluten-containing or gluten-free. There is also a local support group for patients with celiac disease.



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Celiac disease is largely under-diagnosed, and patients often have symptoms for many years before receiving a diagnosis.
