

# **CELIAC DISEASE** **(Gluten Intolerance)**

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Celiac disease is a chronic intestinal malabsorption syndrome that is caused by intolerance to gliadin (from gluten). Celiac's have a **permanent abnormal intestinal immune response to gluten**. Ingested gluten reacts with the small intestines, damaging it by triggering the immune system to attack the delicate lining of the bowel. It is this lining of the gut wall that is responsible for absorbing nutrients and vitamins thus **continual damage and inflammation results in malabsorption of vitamins and nutrients leading to malnutrition**.

Celiac disease is often diagnosed in childhood although it can be diagnosed at any age and can develop later in life after some other triggering factors. It can be expressed in overt (obvious or evident) or latent (dormant or undeveloped) forms. Latent gluten sensitivity can be present in apparently healthy individuals and only becomes evident after a secondary insult (such as infection to the gut wall). Other triggers which can set off latent gluten sensitivity include excessive permeability (leakiness) of the gut wall, nutrient deficiency, increased dietary gluten, or impaired intestinal digestion of gluten. In either case, latent or overt, there is a permanent abnormality of mucosal immunity.

There are many and varied symptoms of celiac disease including bulky, smelly stools that float, diarrhea, bloating, failure to maintain or put on weight (especially in children), irritability and generally feeling unwell. **Due to the problems with absorbing nutrients, nutritional deficiencies are common, and anemia (iron deficiency) can result**. Symptoms of iron deficiency include general tiredness, fluid retention and sometimes shortness of breath. Gluten intolerance symptoms can also present in other areas of the body including the mouth (recurrent ulcers), the kidneys, the joints (arthritis), and even the skin. However you may not have symptoms from the bowel but can be diagnosed after presenting to your health practitioner for other reasons.

It is important to **avoid all gluten as continual consumption can damage and cause inflammation to the gut wall** which leads to **poor absorption of nutrients resulting in malnourishment**. Celiac disease affects mineral metabolism and untreated or poorly treated celiac have a higher risk of developing osteoporosis and/or osteopenia. This is due to poor absorption of calcium or from secondary hyperparathyroidism. Celiac's also tend to suffer from oxidative stress conditions primarily from poor nutrient absorption or increased demand for such nutrients. Therefore there can be a higher need for antioxidant support.

## **ADDRESSING THE UNDERLYING CAUSES**

Diet is of utmost importance in the treatment and long term maintenance of gluten intolerance. All gluten must be avoided as continued consumption will only result in additional damage to the gut wall, trigger more immune activity, and produce further inflammation (thus discomfort and symptoms). There are countless gluten-free products currently on the market, often available in your local supermarket and a gluten-free diet does not need to be dull or bland. Your diet should be high in nutritious fresh fruits, vegetables, gluten-free whole grains and quality protein to ensure you are getting all the required nutrients and will assist your body repair and function at its best. Antioxidant packed juices, salads and fresh vegetables will assist in cell repair and protection and assist healing and health maintenance. Fish, nuts, seeds and quality oils will provide essential fatty acids to reduce inflammation and aid cell health.

Successful treatment of celiac disease involves dietary changes as well as **correcting the digestive processes, reducing the inflammation of the gut wall and helping to heal the gut wall (preventing any leakage into the blood stream) as well as balancing the immune system**. The bowels need to be addressed and your nutritional status needs to be analyzed and corrected if deficiencies exist. Certain tests can be performed to pin point different areas that are a treatment priority in order to reach your health potential. There are lots of high quality nutritional and herbal supplements that can be utilized to aid in the above mentioned goals. Your health practitioner can assist you with all of these treatment aims and can help you to tailor a treatment program specifically for your needs.

Thorough treatment will correct any underlying deficiencies and can prevent secondary illnesses developing down the track such as osteoporosis and anemia. There are a lot of ways celiac disease can be managed and symptoms minimized or eliminated allowing you to lead a long healthy and happy life, relatively symptom free.