

Celiac Disease Fact Sheet

Celiac disease is considered to be the most under-diagnosed common disease today, potentially affecting 1 in every 133 people in the USA. It is a chronic, inherited (genetic) disease, and if untreated can ultimately lead to malnutrition. According to The University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center, "celiac disease affects 1% of healthy, average Americans. That means at least 3 million people in our country are living with celiac disease - 97% of them are undiagnosed."

In people with celiac disease, gluten sets off an autoimmune reaction that causes the destruction of the villi in the small intestine. People with celiac disease produce antibodies that attack the intestine, causing damage and illness. Nutrients are then quickly passed through the small intestine, rather than being absorbed.

There are no drugs to treat celiac disease and there is no cure. Strict adherence to a gluten-free diet for life is the only treatment currently available. This involves the elimination of wheat, rye, barley, and derivatives of these grains from your diet. (source: <http://www.gluten.net/learn/celiac-disease.aspx> & <http://www.celiaccenter.org> - 1/21/2012)

Notes:

- People with celiac disease have varying symptoms. These can include intestinal issues (bloating, diarrhea), stomach cramps or vomiting, migraines, impacts on the nervous system. In approximately 25% of people with celiac disease a very itchy blister-like rash forms on the skin.
- People with celiac disease have varying levels of sensitivity to gluten. Although, all gluten should be avoided at all times some people can ingest a small amount and not react. Other people will react if only one crumb of gluten is consumed.
- Once a person with celiac disease has had a reaction to gluten it can take several weeks to months for them to fully recover and be able to resume their "normal" eating habits. During that time they may be sensitive to gluten free foods they can normally eat.
- It is not uncommon for people with celiac disease to be sensitive or intolerant to other allergens as well. There are 8 common food allergens that include wheat, dairy, eggs, soy, shellfish, fish, peanuts, tree nuts.
- One of the biggest challenges for people with celiac disease is cross contamination. Because a minute amount of gluten can cause a reaction, people with celiac disease have to be cautious when eating out or eating food that has been handled by others. A person with celiac disease must be careful to prepare food on clean surfaces, never share a toaster, not take condiments from a container that has been used to prepare non-gluten free food, not take food from a plate containing both gluten free and non-gluten free items, etc.

Gluten Sensitivity or Intolerance

Gluten sensitivity is thought to affect approximately 6% of the general population according to Wikipedia.org. Gluten sensitivity can be defined as a non-allergic and non-autoimmune condition in which the consumption of gluten can lead to symptoms similar to those observed in celiac disease or wheat allergy. (source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gluten_sensitivity#cite_note-0 - 1/21/2012)

Food and gluten intolerance differ from a food or gluten allergy in the way the body reacts to the presence of the catalyst. The body reacts to food intolerance only when the food is consumed, rather than simply touched or smelled. Many people who suffer from gluten intolerance eat a gluten-free diet in order to avoid uncomfortable, but non-life threatening symptoms. (source: <http://www.vaxa.com/gluten-allergy.cfm> - 2/26/2012)

Gluten Allergy

A gluten allergy elicits a much different response than gluten sensitivity when the gluten protein is present. If a sufferer eats, or even touches, something that has gluten in it, it causes a severe physical response in which the body attacks the gluten protein. A gluten allergy is most commonly associated with an allergy to wheat, since gluten is the most common protein in that grain family. However, unlike gluten intolerance, people who suffer from a wheat allergy are often still able to eat foods that contain barley and rye. (source: <http://www.vaxa.com/gluten-allergy.cfm> - 2/26/2012)

An article titled *New Guide to Who Really Shouldn't Eat Gluten* from *The Wall Street Journal* (2/7/12) explains the differences between celiac disease and gluten sensitivity:

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204136404577206891526292590.html>