

CELIAC DISEASE (CELIAC SPRUE)

Celiac disease is a genetic disorder involving the inner lining of the small intestine. Small intestine is the organ that connects between the stomach and colon (or large intestine, large bowel). It is about 21 feet long and it is where the nutrients, vitamins, and minerals are absorbed into the body. In celiac disease, there is impairment of the patient's ability to break down certain foods. People who have the disease get sick if they eat bread, pasta, pizza, and cereal. These foods and others contain a protein called "gluten." Gluten damages the intestines of people with celiac disease. As a result, their bodies can't absorb nutrients from food. The disease affects children and adults.

SYMPTOMS

Some people with celiac disease have no symptoms. When symptoms do occur, they can include belly pain, diarrhea, bowel movements that are oily and float, weight loss, feeling bloated, low appetite, gas symptoms, itchy skin rash, weak bones, low iron level, and/or slow growth in children.

DIAGNOSIS

Blood test – A blood test looks for proteins that some people make after eating gluten. People who have celiac disease have lots of these proteins, called antibodies.

Upper Endoscopy with Biopsy – The doctor will put a thin tube with a tiny camera down your throat. When the tube is in your small intestine, he or she will take a small sample of tissue. That way he or she can look at the tissue under a microscope and see if eating gluten has damaged the intestine.

TREATMENT

The treatment for celiac disease with dietary changes called a gluten free diet, which is to stop eating gluten completely. This might be hard to do at first. You will need to avoid rye, wheat, barley, and maybe oats. Most patients have a good response to the elimination of gluten from the diet. A few are called non-responders and do not respond. Further testing and medications may be needed in such situation. Cancer of the small intestine may develop in rare instances.

SUPPORT LINKS

Patients with Celiac Sprue can get support and information about their disease through the following contacts.

- Celiac Sprue Association/USA Inc. Phone: (402) 558.0600 Website: <http://www.celiac.org>
- Celiac Disease Foundation Phone: (818) 990-2354 Website: <http://www.celiac.org>
- Gluten Intolerance Group Of North America Phone: (206) 246-6652
- National Center for Nutrition and Dietetics American Dietetic Association Phone: (800)366-1655

