

ACCIDENTAL GLUTEN INTAKE

- what should you do?

From time to time, accidental ingestion of gluten can occur due to factors out of our control, often when eating away from home. When this happens, how quickly we react and how severe our symptoms are, will vary depending on the amount of gluten consumed and the level of individual sensitivity. Some people with coeliac disease react very quickly, while for others, a number of hours can pass before symptoms appear. Some will have no obvious reaction, while others may experience varying degrees of nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, cramping, fatigue, headache, indigestion and/or gas.

Remember, you cannot rely on the absence of symptoms to indicate glutentolerance (bowel damage can occur despite the absence of symptoms). You should always try to adhere to a strict gluten free diet, even if you do not feel unwell when gluten is consumed.

If you have accidentally eaten gluten there is no need to panic.

Treat your symptoms as they occur:

- Stay hydrated – drink plenty of water. If you are vomiting or have diarrhoea, useful fluids apart from water can include sports drinks, flat coke and rehydration fluids, e.g. gastrolyte (you can make your own: Combine 1 litre of water, 2 tablespoons of sugar and 1/2 teaspoon of salt).
- Get plenty of rest and give your body time.

The following over the counter medications may assist:

- Gas – charcoal pills Headaches – Ibuprofen or aspirin (make sure you don't take these on an empty stomach), paracetamol, codeine
- Diarrhoea – Imodium or Lopedium Nausea/vomiting – Anti-emetic – Zantac, travel sickness pills, ginger, ginger biscuits, ginger ale, ginger tea
- Cramping/abdominal pain – Buscopan
- Reflux and heartburn – Antacid, e.g. Mylanta, Gaviscon

The symptoms of coeliac disease do mimic the symptoms of a number of common ailments, e.g. food poisoning, gastroenteritis, other food related intolerances. When unwell, we can sometimes incorrectly assume that gluten is the culprit. If your symptoms persist (despite a strict gluten free diet), consult your doctor about other potential causes. Accidental one-off exposure to gluten will not increase your risk of long term health complications. Regular and ongoing intake of gluten will pose a risk to future health.