

Problems with tolerance of GLUTEN (Coeliac disease or gluten-sensitive enteropathy).



Gluten is the protein part of wheat, rye, barley, oats, and other related grains. In susceptible individuals gluten reacts with the lining in the small bowel, causing damage to the villi (the absorption surface area of the small bowel). An age group can be affected. Both genetic and environmental factors influence disease progression.

Approximately 10% of 1st generation relatives of known individuals with Coeliac disease will also be affected. Environmental factors include severe emotional stress, and/or physical stressors such as pregnancy, surgery or viral illness can trigger symptoms. Coeliac disease has also been associated with Diabetes Mellitus and autoimmunity.

Also related to gluten sensitivity is Dermatitis Herpetiformis, a chronic skin condition with an intensely itchy, blistering rash. Gastro-intestinal symptoms are generally not present, nor is this condition common in children.



DIAGNOSIS OF GLUTEN SENSITIVITY

Diagnosis for Coeliac disease relies on the patient's history and a panel of blood tests to measure gluten sensitive antibodies. If the antibodies are present then an endoscopic biopsy is performed to confirm villous atrophy and flattening (damage to the small bowel lining). For Dermatitis Herpetiformis, a skin biopsy may be deemed necessary to confirm blood test results.

SYMPTOMS OF COELIAC DISEASE

Symptoms are often non-specific and may not be associated with gut-related symptomology. Common features can include: anaemia; fatigue, weakness and lethargy; vitamin A, D, E, K, and B₁₂ deficiency; diarrhoea and/or constipation; flatulence, bloating, abdominal pain; nausea and vomiting; mouth ulcers; weight loss; bone and joint pain; low blood calcium levels with muscle spasm and skin rashes such as Dermatitis Herpetiformis. Additional symptoms in children may include retarded growth, dental abnormalities, delayed puberty and irritability.

TREATMENT FOR COELIAC DISEASE AND DERMATITIS HERPETIFORMIS

Treatment for both gluten sensitive conditions is strict adherence to a gluten-free diet. Once diagnosed, it will be necessary to adhere to the diet for life.

SOURCES OF GLUTEN

Obvious foods containing gluten include bread, cakes, and cereals but it is important for the gluten sensitive individual to be aware of foods less likely to be suspected of containing gluten (i.e. sausages, processed meats, soups, sauces, malt). Experience in deciphering food labels is important. Foods containing wheat, rye, barley, oats, should be avoided along with the following:

- hydrolysed vegetable protein (HVP) unless from soy or corn
- flour or cereal products unless from pure rice, corn, potato or soy flour
- vegetable protein unless made from soy or corn
- malt or malt flavouring unless derived from corn
- modified food starch unless arrowroot, corn, potato, tapioca, or maize
- vegetable gum unless vegetable gums are carob bean gum, locust bean
- soy sauce unless not wheat containing
- distilled white vinegar

Gluten safe foods can include the following, however cross contamination can occur in food preparation and manufacturing.

- Corn, potato, rice, soybean, tapioca, buckwheat, millet, quinoa, amaranth, arrowroot and carob are generally considered to be gluten-free.

Any of the following words on food labels may also indicate the presence of gluten:

- stabiliser
- starch
- flavouring
- emulsifier
- hydrolysed plant protein



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