



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

An allergic condition in the small intestine, triggered by gluten (a protein found in most grains), which prevents the intestine from absorbing nutrients. Most forms are inherited. Celiac disease is not contagious or cancerous. It usually begins during infancy or early childhood (2 weeks to 1 year). Symptoms may appear when the child first begins eating food with gluten. In adults, symptoms may develop gradually over months or even years.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Weight loss or slowed weight gain in an infant following the introduction of cereal to the diet.
- Poor appetite.
- Loose, pale, bulky, bad-smelling stools; frequent gas.
- Swollen abdomen; abdominal pain.
- General undernourished appearance.
- Mouth ulcers.
- Anemia or vitamin deficiency, with fatigue, paleness, skin rash, or bone pain.
- Mildly bowed legs in children.
- Vague tiredness, breathlessness.
- Swollen legs.

CAUSES

Celiac disease is a congenital disorder caused by an intolerance for gluten, a protein present in most grains.

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Family history of celiac disease.
- Pregnancy.
- Other allergies.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Cannot be prevented at present.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

With a strict, gluten-free diet, most persons with celiac disease can expect a normal life. Improvement begins in 2 to 3 weeks.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

In rare cases, gluten withdrawal does not bring immediate improvement.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Firm diagnosis is made by a biopsy, in which a small sample of tissue is taken from the small intestine. Three biopsies may be done, one when you are eating foods containing gluten, another when you are on a gluten-free diet, and a third when you again eat foods containing gluten.
- Only treatment is a gluten-free diet.
- Additional information available from the American Celiac Society/Dietary Support Coalition, 58 Musano Court, W. Orange, NJ 07052, (201) 325-8837.

MEDICATIONS

- Iron and folic acid for anemia.
- Calcium and multiple-vitamin supplements for deficiencies.
- Oral cortisone drugs to reduce the body's inflammatory response during a severe attack may be prescribed.

ACTIVITY

No restrictions.

DIET

Gluten-free diet. It is difficult to exclude gluten from the diet completely, so be patient while becoming familiar with the diet, which a dietician can help you plan.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or your child has symptoms of celiac disease.
- Symptoms don't decrease within 3 weeks after beginning a gluten-free diet.
- The child fails to regain lost weight or grow and develop as expected.
- Fever develops.