



Common symptoms of coeliac disease and how to get help - a guide

What is coeliac disease?

Coeliac disease (pronounced 'see-liac') is a lifelong autoimmune disease caused by a reaction of the immune system to gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye.

When someone with coeliac disease eats gluten their immune system reacts by damaging the lining of the small intestine. Around 1 in 100 people have coeliac disease, although it remains under diagnosed.

What happens in coeliac disease?

When people with coeliac disease eat gluten, the lining of the gut where food and nutrients are absorbed becomes damaged. Tiny finger-like projections called 'villi' which line the gut become inflamed and then flattened, leaving less surface area to absorb nutrients from food.

People with undiagnosed and untreated coeliac disease can have a wide range of symptoms and nutritional deficiencies.

It can take some time before an accurate diagnosis is made. Some symptoms may be confused with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or wheat intolerance, while others may be put down to stress or getting older.

Steps to diagnosis

- **One: If you have any of the symptoms listed, you could have coeliac disease.** Speak to your GP about getting tested.

Do not remove gluten from your diet. Continue to eat foods that contain gluten such as bread, pasta and cereals.

If you have already removed gluten from your diet, you must reintroduce it for at least six weeks before any diagnostic tests are performed.

- **Two: Your GP will take a simple blood test** to check for tissue transglutaminase antibodies (tTGA) and/or endomysial antibodies (EMA). It is possible to have a negative blood test yet still have coeliac disease. **Do not remove gluten from your diet.**

- **Three: Your GP will refer you to a gastroenterologist for a biopsy of the gut.** This involves passing a flexible tube, known as an endoscope, via your mouth down into the small intestine (this can be done using local anaesthetic on the throat and/or sedation).

Small samples of your gut lining are collected and checked for damage typical of coeliac disease.

People with coeliac disease can have a range of symptoms: frequent bouts of diarrhoea or loose stools, nausea, feeling sick and vomiting, stomach pain and cramping, lots of gas and bloating, feeling tired all the time and ongoing fatigue, anaemia, weight loss, regular mouth ulcers, constipation or hard stools, skin rash (dermatitis herpetiformis, the skin manifestation of coeliac disease). See www.coeliac.org.uk/symptoms





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Diagnosis in children

For children a biopsy may not be necessary in every case. Guidelines have been published by the British Society of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition (BSPGHAN) and Coeliac UK recommending children with symptoms of coeliac disease whose blood tests show a high level of antibodies and have the genes for coeliac disease may not need to have a biopsy to confirm the diagnosis.

Your child's GP can refer them to a paediatric gastroenterologist to make sure the correct tests are carried out.



What next?

Once diagnosed the treatment for coeliac disease is a strict gluten-free diet for life. Gluten is found in wheat, barley and rye. Some people are also sensitive to oats. Once gluten is removed from the diet you should start to feel much better.

Who can help?

Your specialist or GP will refer you to a dietitian to help advise you on the gluten-free diet.



You can continue to eat rice, potatoes, meat, fish, cheese, milk, eggs, fruits, vegetables and pulses. Gluten-free specialist foods, such as gluten-free breads and gluten-free pasta are available in supermarkets, on prescription, in health food shops, by mail order and via the internet.

Coeliac UK is the leading charity working for people with coeliac disease and dermatitis herpetiformis, providing information and support.

To find out more about our services visit www.coeliac.org.uk or call **0333 332 2033**.

www.coeliac.org.uk



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