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Celiac Disease

What is celiac disease?

Having celiac disease means a person can't eat gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, or barley. Gluten may also be found in some medicines. Celiac disease is hereditary, meaning it runs in families. The treatment for celiac disease is a gluten-free diet. Other names for celiac disease are celiac sprue and gluten intolerance. In people with celiac disease, the body's immune system responds to gluten by damaging the lining of the small intestine. This lining has small finger-like growths called villi. The villi normally absorb nutrients from the foods we eat. When the villi are damaged, the body can't get the nutrients it needs. People with celiac disease don't always know they have it because they don't feel sick. Or if they feel sick, they don't know celiac disease is the cause.

Is celiac disease serious?

Yes. Celiac disease can be very serious. Besides stomach pain, it can cause anemia, malnutrition, infertility, a certain skin rash, and other health problems.

What are the symptoms of celiac disease?

- gas
- diarrhea
- stomach pain
- feeling very tired
- change in mood
- weight loss
- a very itchy skin rash with blisters
- slowed growth

Most people with celiac disease have one or more symptoms, but not all have digestive problems. And some people with the disease don't have any symptoms. Having one or more of these symptoms does not mean a person has celiac disease because many other disorders include these symptoms.

How is celiac disease diagnosed?

Celiac disease can be hard to discover because its symptoms are like many other digestive diseases. People with celiac disease can go untreated for many years. If your doctor thinks you have



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celiac disease, you will probably need a blood test. You will need to follow your regular diet before and while being tested. If you don't, the results could be wrong.

If your test results show you might have celiac disease, the doctor will perform a biopsy to make sure celiac disease is the problem. For a biopsy, the doctor takes a small piece of tissue from your small intestine. To get to your small intestine, the doctor puts a long tube into your mouth and down into your stomach. At the end of the tube are small tools for snipping out the bit of tissue needed to view with a microscope. You will take medicine before the biopsy that makes you very sleepy. It also keeps you from feeling any pain. Many people sleep through the procedure.

How is celiac disease treated?

The only treatment for celiac disease is a gluten-free diet. A dietitian can work with you to help you learn how to select gluten-free foods. A dietitian is an expert in food and healthy eating. You will learn to check labels of foods and other items for gluten. If you eliminate gluten from your diet, your small intestine will heal. If you eat gluten, or use items that contain gluten, you will harm your small intestine. The following chart lists examples of foods you can eat and foods you should stay away from if you have celiac disease. This list is not complete. A dietitian can help you learn what other foods you can and can't eat when following a gluten-free diet.