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# What is celiac disease?

Celiac Disease is a chronic autoimmune disease that causes damage to the lining (villi) of the small intestine after the consumption of gluten.

Essentially, a person’s immune system sees gluten as a threat but ends up attacking the villi in the intestines which help digest food. Leaving this disease undiagnosed can cause lifelong digestive problems and possible malnutrition. It is estimated that 1 in 100 people have celiac disease.

Symptoms of celiac disease can vary greatly between people. Some may experience everything from digestive issues to symptoms that are not related to the digestive system including headaches, joint pain, anemia, and rashes. Furthermore, some people with celiac disease may not have any symptoms at all. This makes Celiac Disease particularly tricky to diagnose, and for those with extreme symptoms, it can be quite painful to live with.

Currently there is only one treatment for celiac disease, lifelong adherence to a gluten-free diet.

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# Cooking for someone with celiac disease

* How to read foods / labels

A common misconception regarding foods containing gluten is the idea to just to eliminate wheat. While this is the most common carrier of gluten, it can also be found in various derivates of wheat such as spelt, graham, semolina, durum, etc. as well as Barley, Rye, Malt, Brewer’s Yeast, Triticale, and Wheat Starch. These ingredients can often be hidden in food labels, so it is important to know what to look for if you plan to cook foods for someone with Celiac Disease.

* Tips and tricks
  + Look for the gluten free certified seal from the Gluten-Free Certification Organization on the products packaging.
  + Check the allergen list at the bottom of the ingredients. Any foods containing Wheat can automatically be eliminated
    - While wheat is required to be on allergen lists, be sure to thoroughly read through labels that do not list wheat as wheat is NOT the only ingredient that gluten can come from.
  + Look for common “aka’s” such as malt aka barley, breadcrumbs aka wheat, starch or dextrin aka wheat starch (can also be derived from corn, but if not stated on the label, better to be safe than sorry) multigrain, artisan, natural flavors aka unspecified ingredients may contain gluten.
  + Be careful of oats and popcorn. While these two foods are gluten free, the machinery used to harvest them is often used to also harvest wheat which can lead to cross contamination.
  + Check spice ingredients natural flavors and vague ingredients may contain gluten.
  + Avoid using shared condiments or foods where double dipping may have occurred leading to cross contamination.
  + Avoid food from bakeries or pizzerias that are not certified gluten-free.
  + If you aren’t sure, ask the person with Celiac Disease if it is a safe product or avoid it.
* Cross contamination

What is “glutened”?

This is a common term used around our house that means accidentally contaminating a piece of food that was gluten free with gluten or accidentally consuming a piece of food that contained gluten.

Now that you have your ingredients, let’s get to the nitty gritty of Celiac Disease and making food. The biggest concern at this point is cross contamination. We commonly avoid cross contamination with items such as raw meats and vegetables to ensure they do not encounter each other thus preventing us from getting sick. Think of this the same way for a person with Celiac Disease. If you have used a knife to spread mayonnaise on a piece of normal gluten bread and then without washing the knife, used it to spread mayonnaise on a piece of gluten free bread, you have just contaminated, or “glutened”, not only the gluten free bread you spread the mayonnaise on, but also the entire jar of mayonnaise, making it a potential disaster for a person with celiac disease to eat it on sandwiches in the future.

It is extremely important when cooking for people with Celiac Disease to ensure that all items that the food will touch are freshly washed to ensure minimal potential contact with gluten. While this is easy to do with non-porous surfaces such as knives, glasses, counter tops, etc, this can be considerably more difficult with porous surface items such as cutting boards, plastic plates, or cups, etc. Some great alternatives to these would be using disposable items such as paper plates, single use utensils, disposable foil pans, etc. This can help eliminate contamination that may be embedded in these items. Additionally, at times, the appliances used by someone who cooks with gluten can contaminate a person with celiac disease. Think of the fans or setup in a microwave, toaster, or air frier and how these would be impossible to clean all the gluten out of that could have been stuck in them. Friers should also be avoided as previous gluten food fried in the oil will have contaminated the oil. The best method of cooking with appliances for celiac disease is to use solid metals stove top pans, avoid nonstick or cast-iron pans as gluten can get embedded in these and will not come out despite washing. Wheat flour can stay air born for many hours, so be sure you clean your counters thoroughly, let them sit for several hours, and re-clean them prior to making gluten free food. If you need to use an oven, it is best practice to clean the oven and let it sit for at least 24 hours prior to using it to cook gluten free foods to avoid cross contamination.

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# Celiac Disease FAQ’s

* What is the difference between Celiac Disease and Gluten Intolerance or gluten sensitivity?

People who have gluten intolerance or sensitivity may experience the same symptoms of celiac disease such as gastrointestinal distress, however they will not have damage to the villi of the small intestines.

* Can a person with Celiac Disease consume small portions of gluten without experiencing symptoms?

Yes, some people with Celiac Disease have no symptoms at all after consuming gluten. However, despite not having symptoms, the immune reaction will still cause damage to the lining of their small intestine.

* How much gluten is safe for a person with celiac disease to have?

Optimally people with Celiac Disease should not have any gluten, however this is almost impossible to maintain. Best practice for gluten consumption for those with Celiac Disease are foods that contain no more than 20 parts per million (ppm) of gluten with a maximum of 10 milligrams of gluten a day. To give a comparison, 1 breadcrumb contains 24-30 mg of gluten which is 3 times the amount of gluten a person with Celiac Disease is safe consuming in a day. So essentially, they can have 1/3rd of a wheat breadcrumb a day. Keep in mind that some people with Celiac Disease may react to trace levels as little as 1/60th of a breadcrumb per day so keeping gluten as minimal as possible is essential.

* Is Celiac Disease Genetic?

Yes, Celiac Disease is hereditary, so if you were diagnosed with Celiac Disease, your family should also be tested for Celiac Disease. This being said, some people with Celiac Disease may not have any hereditary indicators.

* If I have celiac disease and choose not to follow a gluten free diet, what long term complications can this result in?

Leaving Celiac Disease untreated can lead to malnutrition, early onset osteoporosis, liver failure, neurological symptoms, pancreatic insufficiency, anemia, intestinal cancers, and many other complications including a drastic increase in the chance of developing another autoimmune disorder.

* Are people with Celiac Disease born with it?

No. People with celiac disease are not born with the disease active in bodies, however they are born with the genetic predisposition to develop it due to the HLA-DQ2 and/or DQ8 genotypes they carry. Triggering Celiac Disease can happen at any age by consuming the gluten protein, however we currently do not know what other factors may influence the triggering of this Disease.

* How long will symptoms last after accidentally eating gluten?

For people with Celiac Disease, the length of symptoms may vary, with some people having no symptoms at all and some lasting for weeks to months with digestive difficulties after an accidental gluten consumption.