

Celiac Disease

Celiac disease is a digestive disease that damages the small intestine and interferes with absorption of nutrients from food. People who have celiac disease cannot tolerate gluten, a protein in wheat, rye, and barley. Gluten is found mainly in foods but may also be found in everyday products such as medicines, vitamins, and lip balms.

When people with celiac disease eat foods or use products containing gluten, their immune system responds by damaging or destroying villi- the tiny, fingerlike protrusions lining the small intestine. Villi normally allow nutrients from food to be absorbed through the walls of the small intestine into the bloodstream. Without healthy villi, a person becomes malnourished, no matter how much food one eats.

Celiac disease is both a disease of malabsorption- meaning nutrients are not absorbed properly- and an abnormal immune reaction to gluten.

Celiac disease is also known as celiac sprue, nontropical sprue, and gluten-sensitive enteropathy.

Celiac disease is genetic(it runs in families). Sometimes the disease is triggered- or becomes active for the first time- after surgery, pregnancy, childbirth, viral infection, or severe emotional stress.

Symptoms of celiac disease vary from person to person. Symptoms may occur in the digestive system or in other parts of the body. 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.

Digestive symptoms are more common in infants and young children and may include: abdominal bloating and pain, chronic diarrhea, vomiting, constipation, pale, foul-smelling, or fatty stool, and weight loss.

Also irritability is another common symptom in children.

Adults are less likely to have digestive symptoms and may instead have one or more of the following: unexplained iron-deficiency anemia, fatigue, bone or joint pain, arthritis, bone loss or osteoporosis, depression or anxiety, tingling numbness in hands and feet, seizures, missed menstrual periods, infertility or recurrent miscarriage, canker sores inside the mouth, and an itchy skin rash called dermatitis herpetiformis.

People with celiac disease may have no symptoms but can still develop complications of the disease over time. Long-term complications include malnutrition-which can lead to anemia, osteoporosis, and miscarriage, among other problems- liver diseases, and cancers of the intestine.

Celiac disease affects people in all parts of the world. Originally thought to be a rare childhood syndrome, celiac disease is now known to be a common genetic disorder. More than 2 million people in the U.S. have the disease, or about 1 in 133 people. Among people who have a first degree relative- a parent, sibling, or child- diagnosed with celiac disease, as many as 1 in 22 people may have the disease. Celiac disease can be hard to discover because its symptoms are like many other digestive diseases. To diagnose celiac disease, doctors will order blood tests. If blood tests and symptoms suggest celiac disease, a biopsy of the small intestine is performed to confirm the diagnosis.

The only treatment for celiac disease is a gluten-free diet.

Dieticians can help people choose the right foods. To stay well, people with celiac disease must avoid gluten for the rest of their lives. A gluten free diet means not eating foods that contain wheat, rye, and barley. The foods and products made from these grains should be avoided. In other words, a person with celiac disease should not eat most grain, pasta, cereal, and many processed foods.

Despite these restrictions, people with celiac disease can eat a well-balanced diet with a variety of foods. They can use potato, rice, soy, amaranth, quinoa, buckwheat, or bean flour instead of wheat flour. Gluten free products increasingly available in stores and organic food stores.

Information obtained from National Institutes of Health

Due to this rising concern:

Valley Presbyterian Church will begin to offer wafers that are gluten, wheat, soy, corn, and dairy free during Communion Sundays, starting in December. In the narthex, there will be a plate of these wafers available for use by those with allergies to our communion bread.