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Celiac disease

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What is celiac disease?

Celiac disease is permanent intolerance to food gluten proteins.

Is it an allergy to wheat or flour?

No. Food gluten causes, in genetically predisposed people and with suitable environmental factors, a chronic auto-immune and multi systemic disease.

For those who cannot tolerate it, gluten provokes a gut inflammation which makes nutrient absorption difficult (immediate principles, mineral salts and vitamins). This can lead to deficiencies which cause many symptoms.

What is gluten?

Gluten is a protein that can be found in some cereals, such as wheat, rye, barley, triticale and even oat, but not in corn or rice.

Are people born with this disease?

No, it can appear at any moment in your life. An essential condition is to have eaten gluten for some time. Its symptoms vary a lot (weight and growth changes, tiredness, discomfort, skin symptoms, irritability, etc) and it can even appear in healthy children.

In European people, prevalence is 1% and it is more common in women, with a rate 2:1.

Can it be prevented?

Lack of breastfeeding, a high intake of gluten and its early presence in a diet, the existence of bacterial or viral infections or the increase of gut permeability in susceptible people are said to be risk factors for its development.

Also, there are scientific articles which show a lower prevalence of celiac disease when gluten is introduced in small amounts when the baby is being breastfed when they are between 4 and 6 months old (the old crusts of bread).

How is it diagnosed?

Suspected diagnosis is made because of the symptoms, exploration, belonging to a risk group and a blood test.

The gold standard for a definitive diagnosis is duodenojejunal biopsy, which will always be done before taking gluten away from your diet. Biopsies are usually done by endoscopies, which makes easier to take samples and the results are more reliable.

How is its treatment?

It must be a healthy and balanced diet, with gluten-free food, adapted to every children needs and to family habits.

A lifelong gluten-free diet provokes clinic and functional standardization, as well as the repair of the bowel injury.

Manufactured products are at risk of containing gluten, even if it is a small amount. That is the reason why a natural food diet (meat, fish, eggs, milk and dairy products, legumes, fruit, vegetables and gluten-free cereals such as corn or rice) is better and easier to adopt in everyday life. It is better to avoid bulk products, label-free or homemade since their ingredients are unknown.

In practical terms...

It is good to contact "[Federación de Asociaciones de Celiacos de España \(FACE, Spanish acronym\)](#) [5]" will inform you of many practical aspects: law, help, camps, leisure and they offer continuous update about research and expectations in celiac disease. This all helps to treat this disease and control your diet.

Also, although the diagnosis moment can seem bad news, it is a "very grateful" disease. Changing your habits is the real difficulty; once that a gluten-free diet is established, children get better and they can have a normal life.