



**GLUTEN
INTOLERANCE
GROUP**



Gluten Sensitivity

(also known as non-celiac gluten sensitivity)

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Gluten Sensitivity

What is it?

Some individuals who experience distress when eating gluten-containing foods and show improvement when following a gluten-free diet may have gluten sensitivity (GS), instead of celiac disease (CD). These individuals are unable to tolerate gluten and develop an adverse reaction when eating gluten. Gluten sensitivity has not been well researched, but there is a growing body of clinical evidence supporting the existence of this condition. In 2012, non-celiac gluten sensitivity was classified by an international group of recognized experts as a distinct condition. Some estimates indicate that it could affect six to seven times more people than CD.

Symptoms:

Symptoms seen in gluten sensitivity may resemble those that are associated with celiac disease, but often with a prevalence of non-gastrointestinal symptoms. In GS there is no indication that gluten causes the same damage to the intestine as it does in CD. Some of the symptoms are due to gluten sensitivity and some may be due to under-consumption of nutrients because of illness.

Diagnosis:

There are no specific medical tests that can be performed to confirm gluten sensitivity. Instead, it is a "rule out" diagnosis. To diagnose gluten sensitivity, both celiac disease and wheat allergy must be ruled out. Antibody testing and small intestine biopsy would rule out celiac disease. Immune-allergy tests to wheat would also be negative. Finally an elimination diet and "open challenge" (monitored reintroduction of gluten-containing foods) are most often used to evaluate whether health improves with the elimination or reduction of gluten from the diet.

Treatment:

Scientific studies regarding treatment of non-celiac gluten sensitivity are limited at this time; however the recommended course of action is to follow a gluten-free diet. It may be possible for some individuals with gluten sensitivity to tolerate a low-gluten diet instead of a gluten-free diet. Consult a physician or dietitian for dietary guidelines.

Celiac Disease

What is it?

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disease that results in damage to the small intestine. The disease is genetically inherited and chronic. When individuals with celiac disease consume gluten, their bodies have an immune response. As a result, the villi of the small intestine become damaged, which causes nutrients to pass through the digestive system without being absorbed. This leads to gastrointestinal distress and eventually, malnutrition. Malabsorption of nutrients has many serious side effects. There are several forms of celiac disease including classical (gastrointestinal), non-classical (extra-intestinal), and silent or sub-clinical.

Questions to ask your doctor:

- Should I completely avoid gluten or just reduce the amount of gluten in my diet?

- Will I have to avoid gluten for the rest of my life?

- Should I take a nutritional supplement?

- How often should I follow up with the doctor? With the dietitian?

- What other concerns should I have?

For more information on the gluten-free diet, visit GIG's website, www.gluten.org.

Symptoms:

Symptoms of celiac disease vary by individual and may include diarrhea, gas, bloating, vomiting, constipation, constipation alternating with diarrhea, nausea, skin irritation, malabsorption, weight loss, anemia, chronic fatigue, weakness, muscle cramps, neurological complaints (including seizures), and possibly migraine headaches, concentration and memory problems. Malabsorption caused by celiac disease can have serious effects on many organs and body systems.

Diagnosis:

The diagnostic criteria for celiac disease are very clear and specific. Initial screening is done by blood tests including tTG-IgA/IgG, EMA-IgA/IgG, and DGP. If these tests are positive, a small intestine biopsy should be done. A positive small intestine biopsy, followed by return of health after adhering to a gluten-free diet will confirm a diagnosis of celiac disease.

Treatment:

The only treatment for celiac disease is lifelong elimination of gluten from the diet. Consult a physician for diagnosis and a dietitian for treatment guidelines.

Frequently Asked Questions

Will gluten damage my intestines?

If you have an intestinal biopsy which shows that you do not have celiac disease, there is no reason to believe that damage is being done to the intestine.

If I have gluten sensitivity now, will I develop celiac disease later?

There is no research that shows whether or not individuals with gluten sensitivity will develop celiac disease. Continue to be checked by your doctor regularly if you continue to eat gluten.

Why does a gluten-free diet work for some persons with autism, multiple sclerosis or chronic fatigue, even when they do not have celiac disease?

It is possible that they have GS. This may be one reason why eliminating gluten from their diets results in improvement of some symptoms.

My doctor says that I have moderately elevated blood tests but do not have celiac disease. What do I have?

You may have a form of GS that brings about a slight immune response but does not cause intestinal damage. Avoiding gluten may help you to feel better. Talk to your doctor to develop a treatment plan specific to you.

I avoid wheat, but I am still having symptoms. What is wrong with me?

A wheat allergy is different from gluten sensitivity. If your symptoms are due to celiac disease or non-celiac gluten sensitivity, you need to avoid all gluten-containing foods: wheat, rye and barley, as well as any products derived from these grains. (Note: oats should also be avoided unless they are specifically labelled gluten-free, since oats are commonly cross-contaminated with wheat.)

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Other helpful information is available at:
www.GLUTEN.org.

Advances in celiac disease are fast-paced. If this document is more than 2 years old, please visit our website for updated documents.

This information should not be used to diagnose or treat anemia or celiac disease. For questions about these conditions consult with your healthcare team when considering this information.

Please consider your local GIG Branch as another resource.

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The Mission of the Gluten Intolerance Group is to empower the gluten-free community through consumer support, advocacy and education.

To make a donation or become a volunteer to GIG, visit our website or call the office.