

# Celiac Disease

## and other gluten-related disorders

## Why Not Just Go Gluten-Free?

If you have symptoms of a gluten-related disorder, don't head for the grocery store to start a gluten-free diet. First, go see your doctor.

Gluten-related disorders such as celiac disease and non-celiac gluten sensitivity are treated with the gluten-free diet. "Gluten-free" has become a staple in the headlines for news segments, magazines and newspapers in recent years. Celebrity attention has made gluten-free the newest diet craze. Other articles talk about how a gluten-free diet helped reduce symptoms the author had been experiencing for months or even years. So, it can be tempting to take treatment into your own hands. But instead, first get the proper education and counseling from your doctor or other trained healthcare professional.

Here are some reasons to see your doctor before going gluten-free:

### Your Test Results Won't Be Helpful

One important reason to see your doctor before starting a gluten-free diet is that lab test results ordered by your doctor may not reflect your condition. Why? Because the blood tests for celiac disease can only pick up the disease when the trigger – gluten – is in your blood. And the only way it can be in your blood is if you eat it.

If you start a gluten-free diet before you see your doctor, you may have to go back to a normal, gluten-containing diet in order to receive an accurate diagnosis.

### You May Miss The Real Diagnosis

It is important to get an accurate diagnosis from your doctor. If you don't, you run the risk of treating a disease you don't have, or worse, missing a more serious condition. Other conditions that have similar symptoms include Crohn's disease, bacterial overgrowth, intestinal lymphoma and lactose intolerance.

Also, the gluten-free diet is not only hard to navigate, but it's two to three times more expensive than a regular diet. It can also greatly impact a person's quality of life, including their social and professional lives and psychological well-being. Gluten-free isn't for everyone.

### Important Dietary Concerns

Once you are diagnosed with celiac disease, you should talk with a dietitian or a nutritionist who knows about the gluten-free diet. This is one of the five key elements in the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) recommendations for the management of celiac disease.

Starting the gluten-free diet can be challenging. People with celiac disease must strictly follow the gluten-free diet for life. It means eliminating all forms of wheat, barley and rye, ingredients found in many common foods such as bread and pasta. Gluten can hide in other foods too, such as soy sauce and licorice. A knowledgeable dietitian or nutritionist can help you learn to read labels and inquire about ingredients so that you don't miss something and accidentally eat gluten. Because even a small amount of gluten can cause intestinal damage in a person with celiac disease, it is critical that you strictly follow the diet.

Additionally, a dietitian or nutritionist can help you and your family to create a healthy gluten-free diet. This is particularly important because many gluten-free products are not fortified with important nutrients such as B vitamins, calcium, vitamin D and zinc. In fact, many packaged gluten-free products are high in fat, calories and sugar! As a result, those eating gluten-free may suffer from nutrition deficiencies, which may create health problems in the future.

Finally, a dietitian or nutritionist can also share tips on how you and your family can make your kitchen gluten-free friendly. It is important that you and your family know that shared food products and kitchen appliances and utensils can make you sick if cross-contamination occurs. A dietitian or nutritionist can help you to learn the “in’s and out’s” of eating gluten-free safely within your own home.

### **Celiac Disease Requires Proper Follow-Up**

Celiac disease has increased fourfold since 1950. Doctors don't know why the disease is on the rise. If left untreated, people with celiac disease are at risk for developing complications such as bone disease, reproductive health problems, and premature death. Therefore, it is important for individuals and physicians to work together to diagnose and manage this condition.

Only about 5% of the people with celiac disease have a formal diagnosis. The gluten-free diet is by no means a cure all. Individuals who truly have celiac disease but are not diagnosed by a doctor may not receive the proper follow-up with a medical professional. This may put them at risk for accidental gluten exposure, low levels of vitamins and minerals and other future health complications.

The bottom line is this: if you think you have celiac disease it's best to go see your doctor and get tested. Today's blood tests are widely available, cost effective and accurate. If you think you might have symptoms of a gluten-related disorder, learn more about the [symptoms](#).

It can be easy to get started on the path to a healthy life. For information on the diagnostic process, click [here](#).