



## Celiac Disease

### Illnesses & Conditions Categories

#### British Columbia Specific Information

You may call **8-1-1** to speak to a registered dietitian, Monday to Friday 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., or you can [Email a HealthLinkBC Dietitian](#) about eating gluten free.

More information on celiac disease and a gluten-free diet can be also found on the [Canadian Celiac Association](#) website.

#### TOPIC CONTENTS

- [Condition Basics](#)
- [Related Information](#)
- [Credits](#)

### Condition Basics

#### What is celiac disease?

Celiac disease is a problem some people have with foods that contain gluten. Gluten is a type of protein. It's found in the grains wheat, barley, rye, and triticale (a wheat-rye cross).

When you have this disease and you eat food with gluten in it, the gluten triggers an [immune](#) response that isn't normal. This damages the inside of your [small intestine](#) so that it can't do a good job of absorbing nutrients from your food.

Celiac disease can lead to [anemia](#) or [osteoporosis](#).

In children, celiac disease can slow growth and weaken bones. If it isn't treated, your child can get very sick.

#### What causes it?

Doctors think celiac disease may be a problem with your immune system. Eating foods that contain gluten may trigger the problem. Having certain [genes](#) can increase your chance of getting it. You're more likely to have these genes and get celiac disease if a close family member has the disease.

#### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of celiac disease include:

- Gas and bloating.
- Changes in bowel movements.
- Weight loss.
- Feeling very tired.
- Weakness.
- Tingling, numbness, or pain in the hands or feet ([neuropathy](#)).

Some people vomit after they eat gluten. This is more likely to happen in children than in adults.

Symptoms may come and go. They may be very mild and go completely unnoticed. Or they may be severe symptoms that impact your daily life.

#### How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will ask questions about your symptoms and do a physical examination.

You may have blood tests to see if you have certain [antibodies](#) that could mean you have the disease. Celiac disease triggers the immune system to produce these antibodies.

To find out for sure if you have celiac disease, you will probably have an [endoscopy](#). In this test, a doctor uses a thin, lighted tube to look at the inside of your small intestine. Your doctor can also take small samples of tissue to be tested in a lab. This is called a [biopsy](#).

If the biopsy shows signs of celiac disease (such as abnormal villi and inflammation in the small intestine), a gluten-free diet will be recommended.

A diagnosis of celiac disease is confirmed if the diet makes symptoms go away and if antibody tests become normal.



The treatment for celiac disease is to avoid all foods that have gluten. This is called a gluten-free diet. Eating even the smallest amount of gluten can cause symptoms such as weight loss and diarrhea.

A gluten-free diet means:

- Avoiding all foods with wheat, barley, rye, triticale (a wheat-rye cross), or oats. Oats may later be slowly brought back into the diet.
- Avoiding beer unless it's gluten-free. Beers with and without alcohol contain gluten unless the label specifically says they're gluten-free.

Gluten can also be in things you may not expect, like medicine, vitamins, and lipstick.

You may also be advised to avoid milk or milk products for a while until your intestine heals. Then you may be able to slowly reintroduce them.

If you have nutritional deficiencies, you may need other treatments. Treatments include vitamin, iron, and calcium supplements.

### How can you care for yourself?

Eating a gluten-free diet will help you avoid symptoms and damage to the small intestine. It helps to read food labels carefully and look for hidden gluten. Also look for gluten in medicine and some food additives.

### Related Information

- [Down Syndrome](#)
- [Folate Deficiency Anemia](#)
- [Food Allergies](#)
- [Iron Deficiency Anemia](#)
- [Irritable Bowel Syndrome \(IBS\)](#)
- [Lactose Intolerance](#)
- [Osteoporosis](#)
- [Type 1 Diabetes](#)

### Credits

Current as of:  
February 10, 2021

Author: Healthwise Staff  
 Medical Review:  
 E. Gregory Thompson MD - Internal Medicine  
 Kathleen Romito MD - Family Medicine  
 Adam Husney MD - Family Medicine  
 Jerry S. Trier MD - Gastroenterology

**Current as of: February 10, 2021**

**Author:** [Healthwise Staff](#)

**Medical Review:** [E. Gregory Thompson MD - Internal Medicine & Kathleen Romito MD - Family Medicine & Adam Husney MD - Family Medicine & Jerry S. Trier MD - Gastroenterology](#)



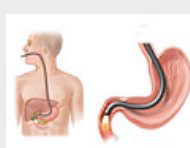
This information does not replace the advice of a doctor. Healthwise, Incorporated disclaims any warranty or liability for your use of this information. Your use of this information means that you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). Learn [how we develop our content](#).

Healthwise, Healthwise for every health decision, and the Healthwise logo are trademarks of Healthwise, Incorporated.

### Media Gallery



[Small Intestine](#)



[Upper Gastrointestinal Endoscopy](#)

**⚠ IS IT AN EMERGENCY?**

If you or someone in your care has chest pains, difficulty breathing, or severe bleeding, it could be a **life-threatening emergency**. Call **9-1-1** or the local emergency number immediately.

If you are concerned about a possible poisoning or exposure to a toxic substance, call **Poison Control** now at **1-800-567-8911**.

Thanks to our partners and endorsers:

