

Resources: Celiac Disease

UNDERSTANDING CELIAC DISEASE

Studies show that celiac disease (CD) occurs in almost 1 in 10 children with diabetes. So if your child has diabetes, you should know the signs and symptoms of celiac (also known as "sprue"). Here are some answers to common questions about celiac disease and diabetes:

What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease (also known as "sprue") is an autoimmune disease like type 1 diabetes, with a reaction to gluten proteins found in wheat, rye and barley. The reaction occurs in the intestine, skin, and other tissues. Common symptoms can include stomach pain, diarrhea, gas, and, in children, failure to grow and thrive. Celiac causes the body to absorb nutrients inefficiently, which sometimes leads to bone loss. Other symptoms may include:

Loss of appetite
Anemia

Weight loss
Skin rash

Weakness
Cramping

Depression or irritability
Unexplained low blood glucose levels

Most often, however, there are no symptoms. Celiac is diagnosed using a blood test and then confirmed with an intestinal biopsy. All children with type 1 diabetes should be screened for celiac disease soon after diagnosis and rescreened periodically, especially if clinical signs or symptoms are present, is recommended.

How is Celiac Treated?

Celiac is treated by removing all products containing gluten from the diet completely. These include primarily wheat, rye and barley. Rice, corn, and oats, are generally gluten-free and can still be eaten. It takes time for the gluten-induced damage to heal, and it's the intestinal damage that causes symptoms. Thus the person with celiac disease must completely remove all gluten-containing foods from their diets entirely.

How does Celiac Relate to Diabetes?

Type 1 diabetes occurs at a rate of about 0.5% in the general population, but at a rate estimated at 5-10% among people with celiac. Celiac is a genetic disease carried on one of the genes that causes high risk for type 1 diabetes. Thus, People with type 1 diabetes are 20 times more likely to also have celiac disease, and vice-versa.

Additionally, research from the Genetic and Environmental Causes of Celiac Disease (CEDAR) has shown that 10% of diabetic children and adults, 3% of their relatives and 1% of the general population have celiac disease.

Some studies have indicated that a gluten-free diet may improve glycemic control in children with diabetes and celiac disease. However, risk for type 1 diabetes in first-degree relatives of children with IDDM is not reduced by a gluten-free diet.

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