

Q. Is there a difference between celiac sprue and gluten intolerance...or are they two names for the same thing?

A. Celiac has several names, including: celiac disease, celiac sprue, ceolic, non-tropical sprue, endemic sprue, gluten enteropathy, gluten-sensitive enteropathy, gluten-induced enteropathy, and gluten intolerance. It is a chronic disease of the digestive tract that interferes with the digestion and absorption of nutrients from food.

Recent findings estimate about 2 million people in the United States have celiac disease, or about 1 in 133 people. Symptoms include abdominal bloating and pain, gas, chronic diarrhea, weight loss, joint pain, skin eruptions and more. People with celiac disease cannot tolerate gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. When people with celiac disease eat foods with gluten in them their immune system attacks the small intestine causing damage and destruction to the small villi lining of the intestine. The villi are important for absorbing nutrients so when damaged, nutritional absorption problems occur.

Celiac disease affects each person differently. Symptoms may occur in the digestive system, or in other parts of the body. One person might have diarrhea and abdominal pain, while another person may be irritable or depressed. Irritability is one of the most common symptoms in children. Some people have no apparent symptoms.

Gluten sensitivity, on the other hand, describes the collection of medical conditions in which the body responds favorably, either directly or indirectly, to the removal of gluten from the diet.



Celiac disease is caused by a reaction to a gluten protein found in wheat and similar proteins such as barley and rye. Oats are generally OK, except if oats are grown in a field used the prior year to grow wheat, barley, or rye. Gluten may also be in other products like medicines, vitamins, and even the glue on stamps and envelopes. The only effective treatment is a lifelong gluten-free diet.

According to the American Celiac Disease Alliance, there are important differences between celiac disease, wheat allergy, and gluten sensitivity (which they call gluten intolerance). Celiac disease is an autoimmune condition, where the body's immune system starts attacking normal tissue, such as intestinal tissue, in response to eating gluten. The changes in the bowel make it less able to absorb nutrients, minerals and the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E, and K.

Celiac disease increases the risk for other autoimmune conditions, such as thyroid disease, type 1 diabetes, joint diseases, and liver diseases. Since wheat allergy and gluten sensitivity are not autoimmune conditions, they do not increase the risk.

While celiac disease requires a completely new approach to eating, you can still enjoy many delicious foods. Gluten free grains include corn, rice, quinoa, millet, amaranth, and teff. Find gluten-free recipes at: www.csaceliacs.org/recipes.php.

Source: <http://americanceliac.org/cd.htm>

