

Celiac Disease

Celiac disease is a chronic disorder which can occur in genetically predisposed people when they eat gluten. Their immune system reacts to gluten by attacking the body. This leads to damage to the lining of the small intestine and prevents nutrients from being absorbed. It affects 1-2% of the population, particularly women, and adults more than children.

It may cause diarrhea, abdominal pain and inflammation, vomiting, weight loss, depression, chronic fatigue, anemia, mouth sores, dermatitis, infertility... In children it stunts growth. The digestive system specialist uses a blood test and a biopsy to make **the diagnosis**. The patient must continue to eat food with gluten until the diagnosis is completed, and you should not start a gluten-free diet without a doctor's prescription.

The only **treatment** for celiac disease is a gluten-free diet for the rest of your life. This will enable your intestine to recover and the symptoms should disappear. It will also avoid complications like osteoporosis, infertility and miscarriage.

Gluten is present in many cereals (wheat, rye, spelt, kamut, barley, triticale or oats). But it can also be found in other foods through **cross-contamination** during manufacture, transport or handling. In case of doubt, you should not eat the product. Some medicines may also contain gluten, so you should check before taking them.

In the kitchen, make sure your hands are clean before touching gluten-free foods and avoid contact with foods containing gluten, oil, stock, kitchen equipment and cutlery that may be contaminated. Gluten-free foods should be labeled and kept separately. The toaster should be used only for gluten-free foods and the oven and microwave must be kept clean. The salt pot should have a cover to stop people putting their fingers in it.

You should not buy food loose, foods labeled as having traces of gluten or a low gluten content, or food manufactured in a factory that works with gluten.

Gluten-free foods can be:

- **Naturally gluten-free:** e.g. rice, maize, fish, vegetables, fruit, milk and eggs. They don't contain gluten.
- **Specially made for celiacs:** e.g. bread, pizza bases, biscuits. You can find them in pharmacies, health food stores or supermarkets.
- **Not specially for celiacs, but made without gluten and labeled as such:** e.g. sauces, purées, pre-cooked dishes, dairy desserts, cold meats. You can find them in supermarkets.

Processed, milled or packaged goods must have the **symbol** guaranteeing them to be gluten-free for you to be able to eat them. The barred ear of wheat mark (the most widely recognized symbol in Europe) of the European License System and the FACE mark certify that products contain less than 20 ppm* of gluten:



Other symbols of foods suitable for celiacs:



Other marks and symbols are permitted by law, but it is advisable to only eat foods that are labeled "Gluten-Free".

*ppm: parts per million