



National Institute of  
Diabetes and Digestive  
and Kidney Diseases

[www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov)



## Celiac Disease

### What You Need To Know

Celiac disease is a digestive disorder that damages the small intestine. People with celiac disease can't eat gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye. The disease could keep you from getting the nutrients your body needs, which can lead to serious health problems.

### What causes celiac disease and what are the symptoms?

Having certain genes, along with changes in those genes, could cause celiac disease. Gluten is a trigger for celiac disease in people who have these genes.

Not everyone with celiac disease has symptoms or feels sick. Symptoms in adults may include a red, smooth, shiny tongue; an itchy, blistering skin rash; stomach pain and bloating; and miscarriages or infertility in women.

Digestive symptoms are more common in children than adults and may include bloating, chronic diarrhea, constipation, gas, stomach pain, nausea, vomiting, and pale, foul-smelling, or fatty stools.



Avoiding foods with gluten is critical if you have celiac disease.

### How is celiac disease diagnosed and treated?

Celiac disease can be hard to diagnose because some symptoms resemble those of other conditions, such as lactose intolerance and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Your doctor may diagnose celiac disease with a medical and family history, physical exam, blood and genetic tests, and

biopsy. If your doctor diagnoses you with celiac disease, your treatment will be to totally avoid all gluten.

Your doctor may refer you to a dietitian who specializes in treating people with celiac disease. A dietitian will show you how to avoid gluten and suggest where to buy gluten-free items.

### Can celiac disease be prevented?

You can't prevent celiac disease, but you can prevent symptoms and damage to your small intestine by following a strict, gluten-free eating plan. You will need to avoid bread, pasta, baked goods, and other more obvious sources of gluten, as well as hidden sources of gluten.

Speak with your doctor if you think you may have celiac disease. Your doctor will prescribe a gluten-free diet if you are diagnosed with the disease.

To learn more visit **NIDDK's website at**  
[www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov)

### Contact Us

NIDDK Health Information Center

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