



THE PLAIN DEALER

NUTRI-NEWS

Intolerance to gluten is largely undiagnosed

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The 2007 Celiac Disease Conference

When: Tuesday and Wednesday March 20-21

Where: The Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine, 4209 Ohio 44 (at junction with I-76), Rootstown.

Agenda: Speakers include Dr. Peter Green, director of the Celiac Disease Center at Columbia University, and Dr. Stefano Guandalini, of the University of Chicago Celiac Disease Program, both nationally recognized experts on celiac disease. Trisha Lyons, a dietitian and celiac specialist at MetroHealth Medical Center, will speak on the gluten-free diet.

Who may attend: The conference is designed for patients, dietitians, physicians, pharmacists, dentists and nurses.

Info and registration: For more information and to register, access the conference Web site at: www.cdconference.homestead.com or call 330-310-5080.

Q:A colleague complains of an array of unsettling and chronic intestinal problems. Her friend suggests that she might have celiac disease.

How does she find out for sure and what is the treatment? And should she try a gluten-free diet to see if it helps?

A:Celiac disease is a genetic intolerance to gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. It affects an estimated one in 133 persons in the United States. That translates to 2.2 million people, 97 percent of them undiagnosed.

Yet although it's more common than higher-profile disorders like Alzheimer's disease, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, lupus and Type 1 diabetes, it's often overlooked.

An autoimmune disorder, celiac disease affects the gastrointestinal tract as well as other body systems. Gastrointestinal symptoms include diarrhea, abdominal cramping, pain and gas. Other symptoms include weight loss, failure to grow, iron-deficiency anemia, osteoporosis, vitamin deficiencies, infertility and dermatitis herpetiformis, an extremely itchy rash consisting of bumps and blisters.

Untreated celiac disease is associated with higher risk of lymphomas and certain gastrointestinal cancers.

In the United States, it takes an average of 9 to 11 years from onset of symptoms to diagnosis, says Trisha Lyons, a dietitian at MetroHealth Medical Center who has celiac disease herself. Like many others, Lyons lived with symptoms for years before being tested.

A blood test for specific antibodies can be used to screen for celiac disease - but the gold standard for diagnosis is an intestinal biopsy. It's important not to follow a gluten-free diet on a trial basis without a firm diagnosis. It could result in a false negative on blood work and biopsies.

The good news about celiac disease? There is an effective treatment: a strict gluten-free diet that eliminates wheat, rye, and barley, and foods containing them. Plain meats, dairy, fruits and vegetables are generally fine. So are rice, corn, beans, and potato and specialty grains such as amaranth and quinoa. Off-limits are many cereals, breads, pizza, pastas, pastries, and soups unless specially made. "Wheat-free" is not necessarily gluten-free.

Gluten may be hidden in unexpected places, such as prescription drugs, dietary supplements, soup bases, breadings, and gravies and sauces. Even the tiniest amount can trigger an immune reaction.

Says Lyons: "It's important to consult with a knowledgeable dietitian who can teach you how to manage the daily challenges of a disease that requires you to question everything you eat for the rest of your life."

Resources:

The Celiac Disease Center at Columbia University has information for patients and doctors, children and adults. See patient FAQ and physician information: www.celiacdiseasecenter.columbia.edu.

The University of Maryland Center for Celiac Research: <http://celiaccenter.org>.

Medline offers links to information about Celiac Disease and the gluten-free diet: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/celiacdisease.html.

To find a dietitian with expertise in celiac disease, visit the American Dietetic Association Web site, follow the "find a nutrition professional" link and search for a dietitian who specializes in celiac disease: www.eatright.org.

Cinda Williams Chima is a registered dietitian on the faculty of the University of Akron. Her column runs in Taste. E-mail nutrition and weight-control questions, labeled "Nutri-News," to food@plaind.com.

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