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naturopathic nutrition association

Coeliac Disease is thought to affect maybe up to 1 in 100 people but it is likely that only a small percentage (1 in every 8 cases) will have been diagnosed. According to National Health Dieticians, estimates are that 700,000 people in the UK probably have coeliac disease. It has been reported that the average time for diagnoses in UK patients is 13 years following the initial reporting of symptoms, and this can be partly explained by the diverse and very general nature of the initial indicators of the disease, such that doctors have trouble recognising them.

This is an auto-immune disease where the body produces antibodies to its own tissues. Attack is triggered by the protein gluten and can lead to malabsorption and malnutrition. Common symptoms include abdominal pain, nausea, constipation, diarrhoea, tiredness, anaemia, headaches, mouth ulcers, weight loss and skin problems. Some sufferers may not show any obvious symptoms.

A variety of tests are available. First is an anti-tissue Transglutaminase Antibody (TTG), IgA or an anti-endomysial antibody (EMA) IgA. If the initial anti-TTG IgA is moderately or strongly positive, or both tests are positive, it is likely the patient has coeliac. A biopsy may then be needed to confirm there has been damage to the intestines – this is the gold standard for diagnosis. Additional tests include IgA antibodies, (about 2-3% of coeliacs are IgA deficient). Other tests may be conducted to assess malnutrition and malabsorption, which is common in coeliacs.

The only treatment involves a gluten-free diet. This requires the removal of grains of wheat, rye, barley and oats, and any foods made from or containing them. However, a gluten-free diet is not the same as a zero gluten diet and, in fact, at present it is not possible to test foods for zero gluten; the current detection limit is 20ppm. Foods containing less than 20ppm can be eaten freely within a gluten-free diet. www.coeliac.org.uk

A new book written by Alex Gazzola includes information on just about everything there is to know about coeliac disease. The book has an introduction by ITV's resident doctor, Dr Chris Steele who is also the Health Ambassador for the charity Coeliac UK. The book includes chapters on 'tests and diagnoses', giving a brief description of the range of blood tests that provide reliable, but not 'perfect' indicators of coeliac disease; while there has been improvement in the accuracy of blood tests, confirming a diagnosis still requires a biopsy.

Coeliac Disease: What you need to know. Alex Gazzola. Sheldon Press, London.
ISBN 978-1-84709-131-14/Paperback, £7.99

Bibliography: NHD Magazine, June 2011

We can also recommend these websites for further information and gluten-free recipes.

<http://www.realfoods.co.uk/recipes>

http://www.bbc.co.uk/food/diets/gluten_free

<http://www.coeliac.org.uk/gluten-free-diet-lifestyle/cooking-and-recipes/recipes>

<http://allrecipes.com/Recipes/healthy-cooking/gluten-free/Main.aspx>

<http://www.food.com/recipes/gluten-free>