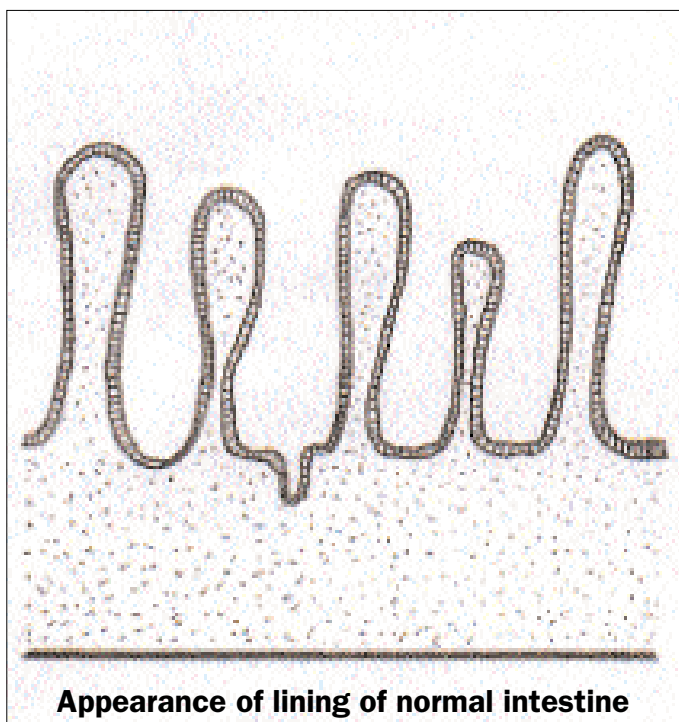
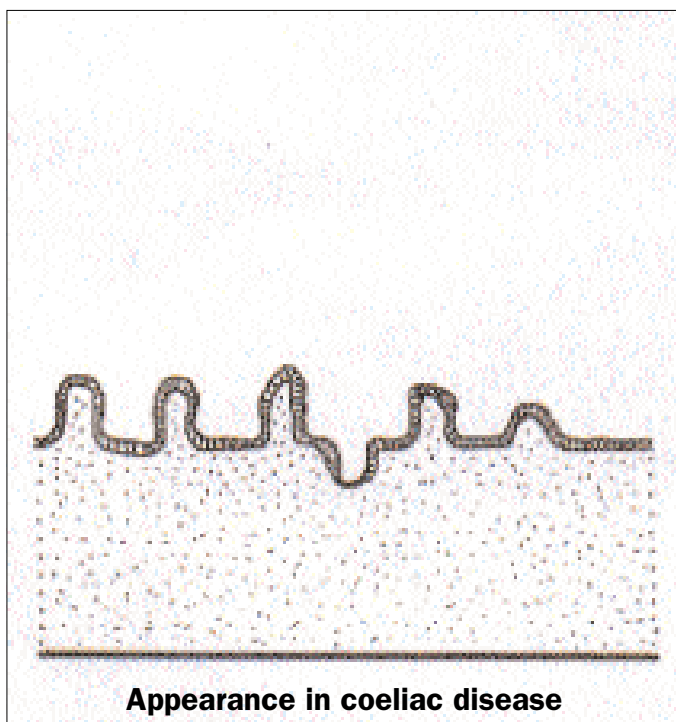


Coeliac disease



Appearance of lining of normal intestine



Appearance in coeliac disease

What is coeliac disease?

It is a hereditary disorder of the small intestine caused by a sensitivity to gluten in food. Normally the lining of the small intestine has a fluffy velvety texture, but with coeliac disorder it becomes smooth and flat. This reduces its ability to absorb nutrients, including sugars, proteins and vital minerals and vitamins from food.

The intestine simply cannot tolerate gluten in food. The exact reason is unknown.

The condition is also called gluten enteropathy and non-tropical sprue.

What is gluten?

It is a type of protein present in most grains, especially in wheat and rye, and also in barley and oats. It is present in most of our breakfast cereals.

Who gets the disorder?

Coeliac disease is a relatively common condition that seems to mainly affect people of Celtic origin.

Children usually develop it at between six and 18 months of age.

However, the onset of the disorder can be delayed and it can occur at any age, when the symptoms come on slowly, perhaps over years, making early diagnosis difficult.

What are the symptoms?

In some people there are no symptoms and when present they vary from one person to another.

In children

Symptoms commence within a few weeks of

cereals being started in the baby's diet. These include:

- Failure to gain weight, or weight loss
- Poor appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Loose, pale, bulky, bad-smelling faeces
- Passing a lot of wind
- Swollen abdomen
- Mouth ulcers
- Nausea and vomiting

In adults

Common symptoms include:

- Tiredness and lack of energy
- Weight loss
- Diarrhoea
- Bulky, offensive faeces
- Faeces difficult to flush down toilet
- Flatulence and abdominal swelling
- Anorexia and nausea

What are the risks?

Generally it is not a serious disorder when diagnosed early, but otherwise it can have serious consequences.

Children can have stunted growth (which can be permanent) if not treated and have an increased infection risk.

Both adults and children can get anaemia due to poor absorption of nutrients.

How is it diagnosed?

Special blood tests can give a strong clue to the diagnosis. However, the key test is a biopsy of the small-intestine lining, which is done under sedation. This shows the flat lining of the intestine.

What is the treatment?

The treatment is by a special diet which is needed for life. It excludes gluten — no wheat, barley, rye and oats.

This allows the bowel lining to recover. In children the response can be dramatic.

Foods that obviously contain gluten (eg, bread, flour and oatmeal) should be avoided and beware those that are more subtle (eg, dessert mix, stock cubes, gravies, ice creams, many processed foods and confectionery).

Forbidden foods:

- Standard bread, pasta, crispbreads, flour
- Standard biscuits and cakes
- Breakfast cereals made with wheat or oats
- Battered or bread-crumbed fish, chicken etc.
- Meat and fruit pies
- Most stock cubes and gravy mixes

The gluten-free diet is not necessarily dull. Supermarkets now sell many tasty products, including special bread and biscuits, which are gluten-free and are labelled as such.

Breakfast cereals containing rice and maize (corn) can be eaten.

Iron and vitamin deficiencies may need correction with tablets — ask your doctor.

Other considerations

There is no restriction to general activities. It is useful to contact a coeliac disease support organisation, such as the Coeliac Society in your state.

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