

- Diseases

Gluten intolerance is a very real issue with measurable symptoms

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Gluten is not for everyone. In fact, people who have celiac disease shouldn't eat gluten at all. Celiac disease is an autoimmune condition that affects the digestive process of the small intestine by launching an immune system attack against gluten, mistakenly damaging healthy cells lining the small intestine.



Even people who do not have celiac disease may find that consumption of gluten results in similar symptoms. These individuals may want to avoid gluten as well. Also known as non-celiac gluten intolerance or sensitivity, this condition is not currently well-defined within the medical community. The Celiac Disease Foundation says some people experience symptoms found in celiac disease, like foggy mind, abdominal pain, diarrhea, headaches, bone or joint pain, or chronic fatigue when they have gluten in their diets — despite not testing positive for celiac disease.

In July 2016, researchers at Columbia University Medical Center published a study confirming that wheat exposure to those sensitive to wheat and gluten triggered a systemic immune reaction and intestinal cell damage.

Researchers previously thought that a sensitivity to wheat or gluten would not result in cell damage. But research now confirms that even without a positive celiac disease diagnosis, people can experience symptoms that mimic those of celiac disease, even in terms of severity.

Doctors are not sure if gluten triggers the immune reaction in non-celiac cases, so more research is needed. That said, removing gluten and wheat products from one's diet provides relief for many people.

According to Schär, a company that manufactures gluten-free foods, anyone who experiences negative symptoms after eating foods that contain gluten should speak with a doctor. A doctor will order blood tests that will look for the presence of immunoglobulin E antibodies that are indicative of an autoimmune response to gluten.

An endoscopy also may check for damage to the lining of the small intestines, as can a biopsy of the intestines. Other tests, such as a radioallergosorbent test, or RAST, or skin prick test can test for a wheat allergy to see if symptoms are stemming from that alone.

Treatment for gluten intolerance or celiac disease involves avoiding products that contain gluten, which is found in wheat, rye and barley.

A growing body of literature suggests that people who do not have celiac disease can still experience non-celiac gluten sensitivity and many of the same symptoms felt by those with the disease.