



Diet advice when being tested for Coeliac Disease

You may be asked to stay on a gluten containing diet or be asked to re-introduce gluten into your diet (gluten challenge). This is to make sure you eat enough gluten before having a test to see if you have coeliac disease or dermatitis herpetiformis.

What is Coeliac disease?

This is a common autoimmune condition affecting the digestive system. The person's immune system attacks its own healthy cells and tissues; this can happen when they eat foods that contain gluten. This can damage their intestine (gut) and means their body does not properly absorb nutrients from food.

What is Dermatitis Herpetiformis?

This is an itchy skin disease caused by sensitivity to gluten and is commonly linked with coeliac disease.

Who can be affected by Coeliac Disease?

Anyone young or old who has, or develops, a sensitivity to gluten.

What is gluten?

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. It is common in many foods in a typical Scottish diet:

- Wheat-based breakfast cereals; for example Weetabix®, Bran Flakes, Cheerios®, Shreddies®, Honey Loops®, Shredded Wheat®
- Bread, rolls and bread products; for example scones, crumpets, muffins, croissants, breadsticks, naan bread, pitta bread
- Foods coated in breadcrumbs or batter; for example breaded fish, fish fingers, chicken nuggets, chicken kiev, potato croquettes
- Pizza bases and flatbread pizzas
- Rye bread/Ryvita®
- Pasta, wheat noodles and pasta dishes; for example, macaroni cheese, spaghetti with sauce, lasagne
- Couscous, bulgur wheat, cracked wheat, semolina
- Cakes, biscuits and crackers
- Pies and pastries

How will I know if I have Coeliac Disease?

The first stage in confirming diagnosis is a blood test, but this is not recommended for infants who have not started to eat foods that contain gluten. Most people with coeliac disease have antibodies that show up in their blood if they eat foods that contain gluten. If the blood test is positive then this means there is a strong suggestion of coeliac disease and you will or should be asked to go onto the second stage in confirming diagnosis.

This next stage is an upper endoscopy. It is a procedure that is carried out in the hospital setting. An endoscope – a thin, flexible tube, about the width of your finger, with a light and camera on one end, is passed over your throat to relay images and take small samples from the inside of your body. The images and samples are used to confirm diagnosis of coeliac disease. You must continue on a gluten containing diet until the day of the final test. The tests are done to see how your body is reacting to gluten in your diet.

It is very important to properly challenge your body before the test. You need to eat a normal diet for at least six weeks to ensure the test is as accurate as possible. During this time you must eat more than one meal a day that includes gluten based foods. For example, you could have a normal size bowl of wheat-based cereal for breakfast and one or two slices of bread as a sandwich for lunch, plus a scone for a snack.

Some people reduce or stop eating gluten but this can cause an inaccurate test and can delay diagnosis. **It is very important that you continue to eat foods containing gluten throughout the diagnosis period.** This can be difficult to manage if you are currently not feeling well, or have gone gluten free, felt better and have been asked to go back on to a normal gluten diet again by your healthcare professional. If you are experiencing significant symptoms and it is proving difficult to keep eating gluten, then you should contact the healthcare professional who is asking you to take the tests. This may be the GP, consultant or dietitian.

References

<https://www.bsg.org.uk/resource/bsg-guidelines-on-the-diagnosis-and-management-of-adult-coeliac-disease.html>

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng20>

*Adapted from resources developed by Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Edinburgh by dietitians working as part of the Scottish Government's Modern Outpatient Programme