



DIETETICS



## Coeliac Disease in Children – Avoid Gluten

By Jane Elsdon, OSCAR Care Group Dietitian

Coeliac disease affects 1 in 70 Australians. It can develop in people of all ages and genders and there is a strong genetic link. In children it can develop as young as when solids containing gluten are introduced. It is a serious lifelong condition and unfortunately cannot be outgrown.

A strict gluten free diet is the only way children with coeliac disease can help them grow well and be healthy.

### What is coeliac disease?

Coeliac disease is not a food allergy or an intolerance but an autoimmune disease. An autoimmune disease is where the immune system mistakenly attacks your body causing it damage.

With coeliac disease the body reacts to a protein called gluten causing damage to the villi, which are small finger like projections lining the small intestine and helping promote absorption of nutrients.

Therefore, if a child has coeliac disease consuming foods containing gluten will damage the small intestine leading to gastrointestinal issues and inability to absorb some nutrients. Physical symptoms may not always be immediate and may take longer to show up after consumption of gluten.

It's 2020 and coeliac disease diagnosis rates are still only 20%  
**It's time to get serious about coeliac disease!**  
#knowcoeliacsymptoms

persistent fatigue

osteoporosis

irritable bowel like symptoms

unexplained fertility issues

anaemia

autoimmune diseases

Take our online assessment to see if you may be at risk  
[www.coeliac.org.au/assess](http://www.coeliac.org.au/assess)

For more information  
1300 458 836

**Coeliac**  
Australia

### What is the treatment?

There is no cure for coeliac disease. A strict gluten free diet is currently the only known successful medical treatment for people diagnosed with coeliac disease. Once a child stops eating gluten, this will help to heal the small bowel and prevent symptoms and reduce the risk of long-term health issues. Even if a child is not showing symptoms, consumption of gluten will still damage a child's small intestine, even in trace amounts. It is therefore very important to avoid all products containing gluten.

## What is gluten?

Gluten is a group of proteins found in wheat, rye, barley and oats, related grains and their products.

Oats are naturally gluten free, however should be avoided due to cross contamination with gluten from wheat, rye or barley crops during harvesting and processing. Oats also contain a different type of protein which may trigger a reaction in people with coeliac disease and therefore should not be included in the gluten free diet.



## Main sources of gluten-containing grains and their derivatives:

- Wheat
- Rye
- Bran
- Durham flour
- Kamut
- Spelt
- Einkorn
- Noodles, soba noodles, Pasta
- Barley
- Bulgar
- Couscous
- Farro
- Semolina
- Triticale
- Malt


## Common foods containing gluten:

- Breads
- Biscuits
- Pastries
- Sausage Rolls
- Crumpets
- Pasta
- Malt Vinegar
- Drinks with barley or malt eg Milo
- Cereals
- Cakes
- Pies
- Crispbreads
- Muffins
- Vegemite
- Pizza & Batter



## Food products that are suitable on a gluten free diet

Naturally gluten free foods include:

- Fruit and vegetables
  - Fresh meats i.e. red meat, poultry, fish (without crumbs, sauce or batter)
  - Eggs
  - Nuts, seeds and legumes
  - Gluten free flour and grains i.e. Rice, quinoa, buckwheat, and corn (maize), soy, lupin, sago, tapioca, millet, amaranth, sorghum, polenta and arrowroot.
  - Fats and oils (butter, margarine and oil)
  - Milk
- 
- A wooden cutting board is filled with a variety of fresh ingredients. On the left, there are several whole carrots, a bunch of green spinach leaves, and a halved hard-boiled egg. In the center, there is a piece of raw salmon, a piece of raw chicken breast, and a small pile of mixed nuts and seeds. To the right, there are several whole yellow potatoes, a head of green broccoli, and a small bowl of corn kernels. The background is a plain white surface.



Products labelled gluten free:

Products that are labelled 'gluten free' contain no detectable gluten and are safe to consume.

Products that are gluten free by ingredient:

If a product does not state it is gluten free it may still be, and this will require you to carefully check the ingredient list. All products must declare in the ingredients panel if it contains wheat, rye, barley or oats. Gluten may also be found in some products that you might not expect. You will need to check the ingredients of some foods to see if its gluten free for example condiments (i.e. mustards, chutneys), flavourings (i.e. soy sauce, salad dressings, mayonnaise), soups, processed meats, dairy (i.e. yoghurt, ice-cream). The good news is there are usually gluten free alternatives for most products. Note Also be aware if a product also states it 'may contain gluten' it is best to avoid this to avoid cross contamination.

It is also important to remember to avoid cross contamination to maintain a strict gluten free diet and this means gluten free food preparation/cooking must use separate kitchen appliances and utensils in a separate area away from gluten containing cooking/preparation as much as possible.



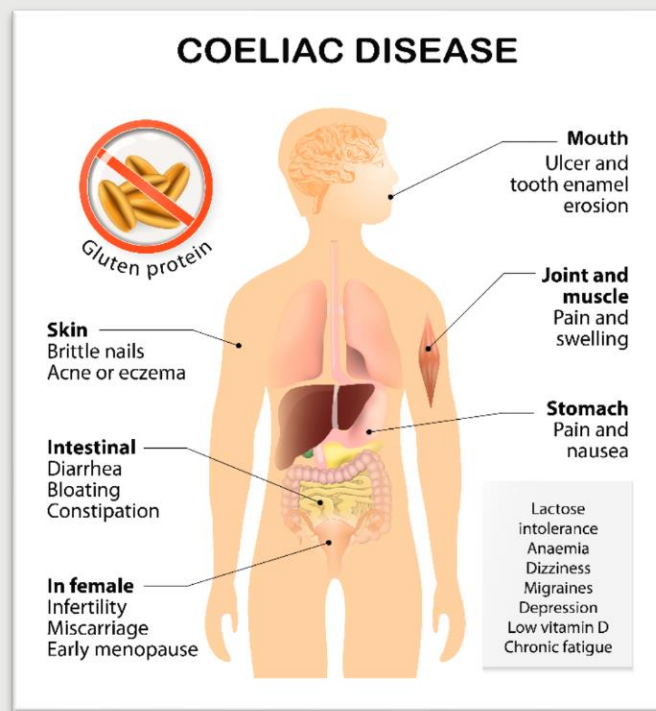


## What symptoms may occur if a child with coeliac disease eats gluten?

Coeliac disease can lead to a number of symptoms, however some children may also be asymptomatic meaning they have no obvious symptoms at all. If children develop symptoms it can take up to 48 hours after ingestion and can range from mild to severe. It is important to remember that if a child experiences no symptoms damage to the intestine still occurs.

### Symptoms may include:

- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Diarrhoea and/or constipation
- Cramping and bloating
- Fatigue, weakness and lethargy
- Irritability, tiredness, abnormal behaviour
- Skin rash, mouth ulcers



If coeliac disease isn't diagnosed or a strict gluten free diet is not followed, it can cause serious long-term health issues:

- Iron deficiency anaemia or other vitamin and/or mineral deficiencies
- Growth problems (Delayed growth or failure to thrive)
- Osteoporosis, some cancers and liver disease

## Testing children for coeliac disease

If a child is showing any of the above symptoms it is very important to have them tested by a doctor. The child needs to remain on a normal diet containing gluten until the diagnosis is confirmed with a biopsy as the tests could be inaccurate if the child is on a gluten free diet during this period.

### References:

1. [Coeliac Australia](#)
2. [The Sydney Children's Hospitals Network](#)
3. [Gastroenterological Society of Australia \(GESA\)](#)



### Need to establish a plan to assist a child with Coeliac Disease?

This article was written by OSCAR Care Group Dietitian, Jane Elsdon. Please call or email via our contact details below.

