

How to self care with coeliac disease

By Vicki Mongtegue, the Free From Fairy

Coeliac disease is an autoimmune condition that affects 1 in 100 people in the UK. My daughter was diagnosed with it just before her third birthday.

Symptoms are very varied ranging from diarrhoea, constipation and or wind to tiredness, mouth ulcers, depression and repeated miscarriages.

Diagnosis is made through a blood test and, if positive, subsequent biopsy. In practice my understanding is that this does not always happen. People are being diagnosed with coeliac disease from a positive blood test alone, by their GP.

In order to test for coeliac disease people should be eating food containing gluten at least twice a day for six weeks before the tests. This is up until the point that the biopsy has been taken, even if a positive blood test has been received.

The only way to manage the condition is to follow a very strict gluten free diet. Even trace amounts of gluten can make those with coeliac disease ill.

Once diagnosed, people are often told to avoid gluten but given very little additional support. This can make following the gluten free diet stressful and difficult.

Often people are diagnosed almost by accident.

They may have visited their GP with some symptoms, had blood taken and then received a positive result for coeliac disease. They may have none of the obvious gastrointestinal coeliac symptoms such as diarrhoea, constipation, bloating, nausea etc. Subsequently it can be very difficult to follow a gluten free diet because there are no obvious consequences to eating gluten.

However, it's vitally important for anyone diagnosed with coeliac disease to follow a strict gluten free diet.

Eating gluten when you have coeliac disease, even small amounts, can increase your risk of developing the following complications:

- Iron deficiency anaemia
- Vitamin B12 and folate deficiency anaemia
- Osteoporosis
- Malnutrition
- Lactose intolerance
- Certain cancers (small bowel cancer, Hodgkin lymphoma and small bowel lymphoma)
- In children, delayed puberty, reduced growth and dental problems

It is also likely to lead to continued ill health.

Once diagnosed it's important to quickly learn what gluten is, where it is found and how to avoid it.

I know from experience that this can be very daunting. It may feel like gluten is in everything and that food can no longer be enjoyed.

However, I can promise you that this isn't the case once you understand how to avoid gluten.

Having spending the last 9 years understanding how to cater for my daughter and supporting people with coeliac disease online, I've created an online course to teach everything I've learnt.

Even though I've always adored cooking, and have myself had to avoid wheat for around 20 years due to Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), I still struggled with her diagnosis.

I spent months on the internet, reading about how to feed her healthily, how to deal with various situations and trying to find answers to my questions.

It was time consuming and lonely.

I don't want anyone else to have to struggle like this which is why my course covers everything required to happily and confidently manage coeliac disease. It will enable people with coeliac disease, their family, friends and carers to understand and cope with the condition quickly.

It is an online course which means that it can be completed in your own time. It is comprised of short videos outlining everything from what gluten is, to how to cook and bake gluten free food and eat on a budget. Along with the videos there are downloadable resources such as shopping lists, foods you can eat and meal plans.

In addition to the content, there is a private online support group where you can ask questions and get support from others who have been through/are going through the same thing as you. And of course, I'm there to answer your questions and support you too.

I offer a guarantee that if you're not more confident about managing the gluten free diet once you've completed the course, you'll get your money back.

My mission is to make the lives of people with coeliac disease much easier.

May 2019 / Self Care Forum