Celiac Disease

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder characterized by damage to the intestinal mucosa, secondary to inflammation caused by ingestion of gluten found in wheat, barley, and rye. Patients with this disease may experience obvious symptoms such as GI discomfort, steatorrhea, weight loss, and skin rash, while others may have subtle signs and symptoms such as a mineral deficiency, or a decrease in bone density. Interventions to treat celiac disease include eating a gluten-free diet, and avoiding all medications containing gluten. Individuals who have first degree relatives with celiac disease should be screened, as these individuals may also be at risk.



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Cause

Intestinal Mucosa Damage
Intestines with Mucus Damaged
Patients with celiac disease have damage to the intestinal mucosa due to chronic inflammation.

Ingestion Wheat, Barley, Rye
Ingesting Wheat, Barley and Rye
The intestinal inflammation characteristic of this disease is caused by ingestion of gluten found in wheat, barley, rye, and oats products. It's important to note that pure oats do not contain gluten, however many oat products can become contaminated with wheat, barley, and rye during the milling process.

Assessment

GI Distress
GI with Flare-gun
After ingesting foods containing gluten, patients may experience GI discomfort, including abdominal distention (bloating), and flatulence.

Steatorrhea
Steak-diarrhea
Patients may also produce foul-smelling, fatty stools as a result of fat malabsorption in the small intestine. Stool with a high lipid content will float and have an oily appearance.

Weight Loss
Skinny-with-baggy-pants
Because protein and fat absorption is affected, patients with celiac disease may lose weight due to malnutrition. A decrease in bone density and dental enamel hypoplasia may also occur.

Dermatitis Herpetiformis
Herb-head with rash
Although less common, an itchy rash composed of bumps and blisters may appear on various parts of the body such as the skin of the face, elbows, and knees. This rash is called dermatitis herpetiformis.

Interventions

Gluten-free Diet
No Grain-glutton Nutritional-plate
Patients who are diagnosed with celiac disease should follow a strict, gluten-free diet. This means avoiding foods that contain wheat, barley, rye and oats. Although oats are typically gluten-free, they could be contaminated during the processing of other gluten-containing products. Patients must also avoid medications that contain gluten.

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Considerations

Screening

Screen-door

Individuals who have first degree relatives with celiac disease should be screened, as these individuals may also be at risk.

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