

# Your Pathway to a Diagnosis of Celiac Disease

## What is celiac disease?

- Celiac disease is a problem some people have with foods containing gluten. When you have celiac disease, eating food with gluten causes an immune reaction that irritates the lining of the gut. When this lining is damaged, nutrients from food are not absorbed well.
- Gluten is found in wheat, barley, rye, oats that aren't labelled gluten-free, and triticale, and may be in foods that have come into contact with these products. For more information on foods containing gluten, visit [celiac.ca](http://celiac.ca).
- Currently, the only treatment for celiac disease is to follow a gluten-free diet, which means not eating wheat, barley, rye, oats that aren't labelled gluten-free, or triticale.
- Celiac disease is a lifelong disease. Care for people with celiac disease usually involves a healthcare team that includes family doctors, registered dietitians, and specialists.

## 1. Check your signs and symptoms:

Celiac disease can have a variety of signs and symptoms. You could also have no symptoms (called silent celiac). Some of the common signs and symptoms of celiac disease are:

- Anemia or low iron
- Abdominal discomfort or pain
- Diarrhea or frequent trips to the bathroom
- Hard bowel movements
- Gas or bloating
- Nausea
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Weight loss
- Bumpy, itchy skin rash (diagnosed as dermatitis herpetiformis)
- Weaker bones (diagnosed as osteoporosis)

Do not stop eating gluten until you talk to your doctor.

You **must** be eating gluten to be tested for celiac disease.

## 2. Tests that may be done:

- A **celiac blood test** called tissue transglutaminase immunoglobulin-A (TTG IGA) can show that you may have celiac disease. **You must be eating gluten for this test to be accurate.**
- If your celiac blood test suggests you may have celiac disease, your healthcare provider may refer you for a **gastroscopy**. This is a procedure where a flexible tube with a light at the end is passed through your throat into your stomach to take small tissue samples from your gut. It is usually done under a mild sedative.
- It may take several months to get a gastroscopy. **It is important to keep eating gluten while you wait so you can get the correct diagnosis.** If you stop eating gluten, you will need to re-introduce gluten into your diet 8 weeks before the gastroscopy by following a process called the Gluten Challenge. Talk to your healthcare provider to learn more.

# Your Pathway for Managing Celiac Disease After Diagnosis

## Treatment:

- A strict gluten-free diet is currently the **only treatment** for celiac disease. You cannot eat wheat, barley, rye, and triticale. Avoid oats unless they are labelled gluten-free.
- Read food labels, ask questions about food preparation at family meals and restaurants, and completely remove gluten from your diet. Gluten can be obvious in breads and cereals, but it can also be in less obvious foods like sauces or spices. Celiac Canada has an excellent Gluten Free Labelling Guide that you and your family can review: [celiac.ca/food-labelling](https://celiac.ca/food-labelling)
- A registered dietitian can help you set up and follow a gluten-free diet that is right for you.
- It can take a while to feel better after you start your gluten-free diet. If you are not feeling much better after 6 months, see your doctor. Long-term follow-up with your doctor is important to make sure that your gut has healed, and that your gluten-free diet is working.
- You may need vitamin or mineral supplements because of your celiac disease and the gluten-free diet. Your dietitian or doctor can recommend what is right for you.

## Write any notes or questions you may have here:

## Seeing a specialist is only recommended if:


- Your symptoms continue or get worse after following the treatment and management options in this pathway.
- You and your healthcare providers identify concerning symptoms or test results.

## Resources:

- [MyHealth.Alberta.ca](https://myhealth.alberta.ca)
- **Nutrition workshops and classes**
  - [ahs.ca/NutritionWorkshops](https://ahs.ca/NutritionWorkshops) (search: Celiac)
- **Nutrition education handouts**
  - [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) (search: Gluten Free)
- **Health Link** has registered dietitians available to answer nutrition questions. If you have a nutrition question, you can complete a self-referral at [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811) or call 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian.
- **Celiac Canada** ([celiac.ca](https://celiac.ca)) is an organization that offers:
  - Information and programs to help you start and manage your gluten-free diet.
  - A gluten-free food guide for children and youth.
  - Information about food recalls in Canada, advances in research, and tax credits you can use for the higher cost of gluten-free food.
  - Local chapters you can join for meetings and activities and to meet other people from the celiac community. Visit [celiacedmonton.ca](https://celiacedmonton.ca) for the Edmonton area and northern Alberta and visit [calgaryceliac.ca](https://calgaryceliac.ca) for the Calgary area and southern Alberta.



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