

## Celiac is the Most Common Genetic Disease in the World!

By Marie-Claude Beaulieu, RHN

But awareness of Celiac disease (CD) is very low, even though recent research indicates 1:100 are affected. As many as 300,000 Canadians could have Celiac. If one is diagnosed with Celiac, other family members have a 1:10 risk factor for the disease.

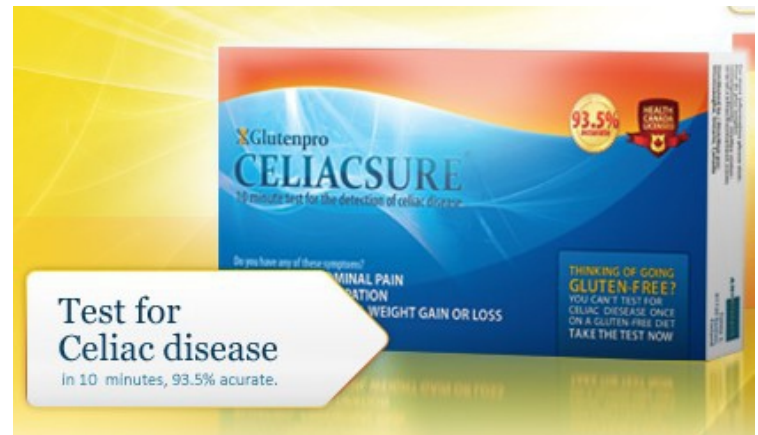
The month of **May** is Celiac Awareness month across Canada. There is a need to highlight the impact of Celiac disease on Canadians, to increase the awareness of the disease, to support the cause through Celiac-friendly food venues, and to help Celiac patients to stay healthy in spite of this disease.

Celiac is difficult to recognize and is often overlooked because the symptoms can be non-specific or non-existent. People feel “lousy” for many years before being diagnosed. The average timeframe for a diagnosis in Canada is 11 years, and the average age of diagnosis is 46 years of age! Are you sick from a common disease you do not yet know you have? Celiac is a common disease that one in a hundred has *or does not know they have*. More than 95% still remain undiagnosed. Education, recognition of symptoms, and accessibility of screening tests are needed to ensure early diagnosis.

CD is a serious gastrointestinal auto-immune disease prohibiting the body from tolerating gluten (specifically gliadin) found in wheat, rye, and barley, causing a wide spectrum of clinical symptoms. The genetically inherited predisposition to the disease does not mean one will have Celiac; but the disease can then be triggered by stress, recurrent infections, surgery, trauma, and even pregnancy.

The myriad of clinical signs and symptoms associated with Celiac can be: diarrhea and constipation, abdominal pain, bloating and gas, nausea and vomiting, indigestion, lactose intolerance, skin issues, burning and itchy rash, hair loss, mouth ulcers and canker sores, bone and joint pains, breathlessness, fatigue, weight loss, anemia, delayed puberty, poor growth, dental enamel defects, headaches, depression, oedema of feet/hands, menstrual irregularities, infertility, easy bruising, elevated liver enzymes, bacterial overgrowth and dysbiosis. It is often confused

with and misdiagnosed as IBS, fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome.



Celiac disease screening is also recommended for first degree relatives of diagnosed Type 1 diabetes, and Down's and Turner syndromes. An estimated 4-9% of Type 1 diabetics have Celiac disease (Diab.Care, March 23, 2011). Auto-immune manifestations (hepatitis, thyroid, Lupus, Sjogrens, arthritis...) are common, often with absence of gastro-intestinal symptoms. Other Celiac associated medical conditions like osteopenia/osteoporosis, ataxia, neuropathy, and lymphomas also need to be screened, as untreated Celiac disease predisposes one to other chronic disorders. These develop after the intestines have been affected for a very long time and might be prevented by an early diagnosis. If diagnosed early, many of the long-term complications can be alleviated; the gut inflammation can be reduced and the damaged tissues can heal. There is no cure and the only treatment is to remain gluten-free, for life.

**Diet** is the most crucial aspect of managing Celiac disease. More than 70% of Celiac's respond beautifully to a gluten-free diet within a few days. The flattened villi structures can be fully restored with a full gluten-free diet. It is thus essential to have a good understanding of which



**THINKING OF GOING GLUTEN FREE?**  
**TEST FOR CELIAC DISEASE FIRST**  
You cannot test for Celiac disease once on a Gluten free diet.

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foods and ingredients contain gluten. A gluten-free diet means knowing what foods contain gluten, looking for hidden sources of gluten in products and in meds; it involves lifestyle changes as many of the regularly eaten foods like pasta, pizzas, breads, sausages, muffins, and beer contain gluten. Learning how to read and interpret the ingredients is also very relevant.

The first steps to take after a confirmed diagnosis are to:

- purge your pantry,
- learn to read food labels,
- stock-up on gluten-free alternate foods,
- learn to cook,
- network through Celiac or gluten-free associations and blogs,
- review Celiac-friendly restaurant lists,
- ask questions and if in doubt, do not consume that food,
- get help & guidance from a professional nutritionist with expertise in Celiac, gut health and gluten-free diet counselling.

Other factors that can aggravate Celiac's health conditions are a poor or restricted diet, stress, allergies, and lifestyle. Celiacs need to be aware of their micro-nutrient deficiencies and nutritional imbalances. Gluten-free grains, flours and cereals tend to be lower in B vitamins, minerals and fiber. Care must be taken to ensure proper intake of nutrients. The effects of the gluten consumed are cumulative and can lead to other medical conditions. The abnormal response to gluten results in inflammatory injury to the small intestine (villi) and decreases the absorption of nutrients such as fatty acids, iron, calcium, vitamins A, D, E, K, B12 and folate. Avoidance of dairy (lactose & casein) containing foods in addition to a gluten-free diet may be beneficial until the intestinal mucosal has recovered.

Point-of-care blood screening like CELIACSURE™ can accurately determine if someone has the disease. Hospital lab tests can be up to 3 weeks for results; CELIACSURE™ can provide immediate results and may provide a reasonable diagnosis for personal peace of mind.

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## FOR SOMEONE WITH CELIAC DISEASE THIS BREAD IS DEADLY



## ASK YOUR DOCTOR FOR THE CELIAC SCREENING TEST



**CELIAC.CA**

CELIACSURE™ (Biocard Celiac test) is Health Canada approved; it is a at-home test kit for detection of Celiac disease associated with IgA antibodies to transglutaminase (tTG) from a finger prick sample of blood. The test is carried out in less than 15 minutes; is safe, affordable, and easy to use, and is available for sale at Effective Health Solutions.

It is a first-step in a diagnosis, allowing early detection in a community with little access to primary care. It can reduce the median wait time to biopsy after a positive result is obtained by many weeks (BMJ Dec 6<sup>th</sup>,

2007). CELIACSURE™ has been proven to have an average of 92% sensitivity, 95% specificity, and 93.5% accuracy, and thus is comparable to hospital laboratory results. It can measure as low as 5 U/ml of antibodies ([www.glutenpro.com](http://www.glutenpro.com)). If the Celiac antibodies are positive, an endoscopy with intestinal biopsy is required to confirm the diagnosis.

A gluten-free diet should not be started before the blood test and the confirmatory tissue biopsy has been taken, as it can interfere with making an accurate diagnosis. For anyone already on a gluten-free diet, a gluten challenge of an equivalent of 4 slices of bread for a minimum of 4 weeks is necessary and recommended by the Canadian Celiac Association (CCA) before doing any blood screening for the presence of Celiac antibodies. The CCA is a non-profit, registered charity association that is volunteered-driven, with the purpose of increasing awareness of the disease, encouraging research into Celiac, and providing reliable information about the disease and the gluten-free diets to health-care providers, food manufacturers and patients ([www.celiac.ca](http://www.celiac.ca)).

Let's help reduce the number of undiagnosed Celiac's and save lives. There is no better time to be Celiac. Be aware. Be tested.

Marie-Claude (RHN) is a Holistic Nutritionist who graduated with a certificate of Distinguished Merit from the Canadian School of Natural Nutrition (CSNN). She was diagnosed with Celiac in 2007, and her personal experience with Celiac for her and many of her family members lead to continued research & studies in Immunology, Nutrition & natural methods of healing the body. She brings along more than 30 years of medical experience, and specializes in Celiac disease and gut health ([marie-claude@effectivehealth.ca](mailto:marie-claude@effectivehealth.ca)).