



WM. K. WARREN MEDICAL RESEARCH CENTER FOR CELIAC DISEASE

University of California, San Diego
Department of Medicine
9500 Gilman Drive (412 MTF)
La Jolla, CA 92093-0623

Office: (858) 822-1022
FAX: (858) 534-5691
celiaccenter@ucsd.edu
<http://celiaccenter.ucsd.edu>

TESTING FOR CELIAC DISEASE

What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease, also known as celiac sprue or gluten-sensitive enteropathy, is an inflammatory condition of the small intestine that occurs in genetically susceptible individuals. Celiac disease is characterized by damage to the lining of the small intestine that occurs after ingestion of gluten, a dietary protein found in wheat, rye and barley. The disease can appear at any time in a person's life. Celiac disease is recognized to have a prevalence ranging from 0.5 – 1.0 % in the U.S. population, occurring in approximately 2-3 million people. The symptoms of celiac disease are varied, and as many as 50% of newly diagnosed patients with celiac disease do not have major gastrointestinal symptoms. Gluten can cause wide-ranging complications in patients with celiac disease that may require treatment involving several medical specialties.

Symptoms of Celiac Disease may include any of the following:

- Bloating, gas or abdominal pain
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Chronic fatigue and weakness
- Indigestion
- Itchy skin rash
- Fatigue and weakness
- Irritability or behavior change
- Unexplained weight loss
- Delayed growth
- Mouth ulcers
- Tingling or numbness in hands & feet

Examples of situations/conditions in which screening for Celiac Disease should be considered:

- Immediate family members with celiac disease
- Unexplained anemia
- Early onset osteoporosis or osteopenia
- Unexplained infertility or miscarriage
- Dermatitis herpetiformis
- Peripheral neuropathy, ataxia or unexplained neurologic symptoms
- Dental enamel hypoplasia
- Type 1 diabetes
- Autoimmune thyroid disease
- Unexplained abnormal liver tests
- Autoimmune liver disease
- Sjögren's syndrome
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Juvenile idiopathic arthritis
- Down syndrome
- Microscopic colitis

How can you get tested for Celiac Disease?

If you suffer from one or more of the above symptoms, and have been diagnosed with any of the above conditions, you should ask your healthcare provider to order blood tests for the initial screening of celiac disease. The following blood test is recommended.

- IgA tissue transglutaminase antibody (tTG)

If the blood test suggests celiac disease, you should next see a gastroenterologist for an evaluation and possibly biopsy of the lining of the small intestine, which is required to establish a diagnosis of celiac disease.

What should you do if the blood tests are negative, but you still think you have Celiac Disease?

While the blood tests for celiac disease are very good at detecting this condition, false negative and false positive tests do occur. False negative results (i.e normal test in someone with celiac disease) are more common with very mild disease or if you are already on a gluten-free diet. Some patients test negative for celiac disease and turn out years later upon repeat testing to have celiac disease. Repeating your blood test may be an important first step. Some individuals also take advantage of genetic testing to determine whether or not they have certain HLA DQ genes that are necessary for developing celiac disease. If you do not have these HLA DQ genes, your symptoms are likely related to a condition other than celiac disease. The HLA DQ genes associated with celiac disease are present in up to one third of the population, so the tests are only helpful in excluding celiac disease as a diagnosis. That is, if you don't have the Celiac Disease associated DQ genes, you cannot have Celiac Disease. Small intestinal biopsy can be considered in some individuals where 1) blood tests were not conclusive in diagnosing celiac disease, but 2) genetic testing indicated the susceptibility genes were present, and 3) your doctor still strongly suspects the presence of celiac disease. In a small number of people blood tests for IgA tissue transglutaminase antibody are negative because the individual is IgA deficient. If this is the case, rescreening can be done using the IgG tissue transglutaminase antibody.

What can the Wm. K. Warren Medical Research Center for Celiac Disease do for you?

If the results of your blood tests suggest celiac disease, you may contact the Warren Celiac Center for an appointment and evaluation.

- Call the Warren Celiac Center at (858) 822-1022. You will be asked some pre-screening questions about your health. A referral from a current physician may be required for those with an HMO and in other circumstances.