

Gut Check

Chronic digestive diseases are on the increase, but new treatments and better understanding can help keep them under control

If you find yourself battling unexplained weight loss and diarrhea, you might want to talk to your doctor about **CELIAC DISEASE**, an autoimmune disease in which your body has trouble digesting gluten. It's important to treat celiac disease because diarrhea can lead to malnutrition. "If you have diarrhea, you don't absorb fat very well, so you can become deficient in fat-soluble vitamins such as vitamins A, D and K," says John Abdulian, M.D., a gastroenterologist on the medical staff at Baylor Medical Center at Waxahachie. "Iron deficiencies are also common."

If your doctor suspects celiac disease, he or she can biopsy your small bowel. In cases of celiac disease, the villi—the tiny projections that increase the surface area of your bowel—are atrophied, so they can't absorb the nutrients in your food.

To treat celiac disease, eliminate wheat from your diet. "It's important to check labels on all foods," says Dr. Abdulian. "A lot of things do contain wheat, so you have to be very selective about what you eat." Health food stores and even traditional grocery stores often

carry gluten-free products. If a gluten-free diet doesn't help, your doctor may recommend corticosteroids.

Autoimmune diseases such as celiac disease tend to cluster, so people with celiac disease might find they're also facing diabetes, thyroid disease or rheumatoid arthritis. **IRRITABLE BOWEL DISEASE (IBD)** also is associated with celiac disease. "Irritable bowel disease is one of the most common gastrointestinal conditions," says Dr. Abdulian.



In Digestive Distress?

If you need a referral to a gastroenterologist on the Baylor Waxahachie medical staff, call **1-800-4BAYLOR** or visit **FindDrRight.com**.

IBD typically affects women in their teens or 20s. "It's a hypersensitivity of the digestive system to multiple things," Dr. Abdulian says. People notice abdominal pain or bloating that's either relieved or set off by a bowel movement. While IBD is a lifelong problem, its severity can vary, and it may improve or worsen over time. Treatment includes eliminating foods that trigger problems; examples include refined grain products, dairy, coffee, carbonated drinks, alcohol and large fatty meals. Adding probiotics to your diet also can be helpful. Probiotics, microorganisms that benefit your health, are found in yogurt, other fermented foods and supplements. Peppermint oil works for some people, and severe cases may respond to antidepressants. ●

By Stephanie Thurrott

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