

What is coeliac disease?

Coeliac disease is an immune based condition in which the body responds abnormally to dietary gluten. This autoimmune reaction causes systemic inflammation and small bowel damage. Approximately 1 in 70 people in Australia (1.4% of the population) have coeliac disease.

It is estimated that only 20% of those with coeliac disease are currently diagnosed. Coeliac disease is renowned as a 'clinical chameleon', as it can have subtle symptoms and signs that mimic those of other conditions, like varying degrees of gastrointestinal symptoms, weight loss, tiredness and headaches.

Diagnosis

Coeliac Australia has an online self-assessment tool to help determine whether you should be tested for coeliac disease. [Click here to use the tool.](#)

The process of testing for coeliac disease is simple:

1. Do not commence a gluten free diet before being tested.

If a gluten free diet has already been adopted, the tests used to diagnose coeliac disease are unreliable.

2. Your doctor will first do a blood test to screen for coeliac disease.

3. If the blood tests show possible coeliac disease, your doctor will then send you to a gastroenterologist who will perform a procedure called a gastroscopy or endoscopy.

This is a simple procedure done under sedation where a flexible tube is inserted through the mouth and into the intestine, where a biopsy is taken. To confirm coeliac disease, this biopsy will show inflammation of the lining of the intestinal wall under a microscope.

The only treatment for coeliac disease is a lifelong gluten free diet. Strict compliance is necessary, regardless of the severity of symptoms experienced.

Coeliac disease and the gluten free diet

Gluten is a naturally occurring protein found in wheat, rye, barley and oats. The type of gluten in oats is quite different to the type of gluten in wheat, rye and barley. Some people with coeliac disease can tolerate oats that are not contaminated by wheat, rye or barley. You should speak to your gastroenterologist about the process of testing your tolerance to contaminant-free oats.

Gluten containing foods

Unless labelled as gluten free...

Bread	Breakfast cereal
Pasta	Barley
Noodles	Bagels
Pastries/cakes	Couscous
Pizza	Soy sauce
Beer	
Baked goods (e.g. doughnuts, eclairs)	
Biscuits and crackers	
Spelt products (bread, pasta, flour)	

May contain gluten...

Pre-made sauces and dressings	Processed meats (eg. sausages and deli meats)
Pre-made soups and stocks	Condiments
Stock cubes	Confectionary
Ready-made meals	Chocolate
Deep fried foods (due to batter)	Muesli bars
	Potato crisps

Gluten free foods

(Always double-check the ingredients list of packaged products)

- ✓ Rice (including glutinous rice)
- ✓ Quinoa
- ✓ Corn
- ✓ Buckwheat
- ✓ Sorghum
- ✓ Amaranth
- ✓ Gluten free bread
- ✓ Pasta made from rice, quinoa, corn, buckwheat, sorghum, amaranth
- ✓ Breakfast cereal made from rice, quinoa, corn, buckwheat, sorghum, amaranth
- ✓ Popcorn
- ✓ Fresh fruit
- ✓ Fresh vegetables
- ✓ Fresh meat, poultry and seafood
- ✓ Tofu
- ✓ Nuts and seeds
- ✓ Milk, yoghurt and cheese (unflavoured/plain)
- ✓ Legumes (beans, chickpeas, lentils)
- ✓ Tamari (gluten free soy sauce)
- ✓ Wine and spirits



Beware of cross-contamination

If gluten free food comes in contact with gluten containing food (even in trace amounts), that food is no longer coeliac-safe. Follow these seven tips to minimise the risk of cross contamination:

1. New research suggests separate toasters are not necessary. Simply ensure your toaster is clean and it can be shared between gluten free and gluten containing bread
2. Use separate, clean serving utensils and chopping boards for all gluten free foods
3. Wash your hands thoroughly before preparing gluten free food
4. Have separate spreads and condiments to be used with gluten free products only (*butter, honey, jam, mayonnaise, etc.*)
5. Don't cook gluten free pasta in the same water that has just cooked regular pasta
6. Don't deep-fry gluten free foods in oil that has been used to fry gluten-containing foods
7. Store gluten free products in separate containers to gluten-containing ones