



OPINION ARTICLE

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## Diagnosis of Celiac Disease and its Impact on Mental Health

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### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: 25-Oct-2024, Manuscript No. JCMEDU-24-153815;  
Editor assigned: 28-Oct-2024, PreQC No. JCMEDU-24-153815 (PQ);  
Reviewed: 11-Nov-2024, QC No. JCMEDU-24-153815;  
Revised: 18-Nov-2024, Manuscript No. JCMEDU-24-153815 (R);  
Published: 25-Nov-2024

### Description

Celiac Disease (CD) is a chronic autoimmune disorder triggered by the ingestion of gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. In genetically predisposed individuals, gluten consumption leads to inflammation and damage to the small intestine, particularly the villi, which are responsible for nutrient absorption. While the physical manifestations of CD, such as gastrointestinal symptoms and malabsorption, are widely recognized, an emerging area of concern is its significant impact on mental health. Many individuals with celiac disease experience anxiety, depression, irritability, cognitive difficulties and even mood swings, which can severely affect their quality of life. This study searches into the diagnostic process of CD, focusing on how it is identified and analyzes the mental health implications that often accompany the condition.

### Diagnosis of CD on mental health

The diagnosis of celiac disease begins with a clinical evaluation. Healthcare providers assess the patient's medical history, symptoms and family history of autoimmune diseases. Celiac disease often presents with gastrointestinal symptoms like chronic diarrhea, bloating, abdominal pain and weight loss. However, atypical presentations, such as skin rashes (dermatitis herpetiformis), joint pain or neurological symptoms, can complicate diagnosis. Additionally, it's important to investigate family history. Celiac disease tends to run in families, with first-degree relatives (parents, siblings) of affected individuals at higher risk. Thus, a family history of celiac disease or other autoimmune conditions (e.g., type 1 diabetes, thyroid disease) can prompt further investigation. The gold standard for diagnosing CD is a biopsy of the small intestine. During an endoscopy, a small tissue sample from the duodenum (the first part of the small intestine)

is taken and examined for damage to the villi. In untreated celiac disease, the villi appear flattened or blunted due to immune-mediated damage. This biopsy is important for confirming the diagnosis and assessing the degree of damage caused by gluten exposure. It's important to note that patients must be on a regular gluten-containing diet before testing, as a gluten-free diet may lead to healing of the intestine, making it more difficult to identify damage during a biopsy.

### Psychiatric symptoms of CD

While CD is primarily recognized for its gastrointestinal and nutritional consequences, an increasing body of research suggests that it also has significant effects on mental health. The impact of CD on mental health can stem from multiple sources, including the autoimmune nature of the disease, nutritional deficiencies, and the psychological burden of managing a lifelong condition. Several psychiatric conditions are commonly seen in individuals with celiac disease, both during the active phase of the disease (when the gut is still damaged) and even after the adoption of a gluten-free diet. Common mental health issues include:

**Anxiety:** Anxiety disorders are prevalent among people with celiac disease, possibly due to the stress of managing a strict gluten-free diet, fear of gluten exposure and social isolation. The constant vigilance needed to avoid gluten contamination can contribute to heightened stress levels, which may evolve into chronic anxiety.

**Depression:** Depression is another common mental health issue for those living with celiac disease. Studies have shown that untreated celiac disease can lead to significant mood disturbances, including feelings of sadness, hopelessness and frustration. The chronic nature of the condition, combined with the social and

dietary restrictions, can contribute to these depressive symptoms.

**Irritability:** People with celiac disease may also experience irritability and mood swings. These mood disturbances can be exacerbated by ongoing physical symptoms and the emotional strain of dealing with a chronic condition.

### **Treatment approach of CD**

The primary treatment for CD is a strict, lifelong gluten-free diet. Following this diet can help heal the intestine, improve nutritional absorption and alleviate both gastrointestinal and mental health symptoms. However, managing mental health requires additional interventions. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and counseling can help individuals manage the emotional burden of CD and cope with anxiety, depression and stress. Correcting nutritional deficiencies through dietary counseling and supplementation is important for improving mental health outcomes. In cases of severe mental health symptoms, medication such as antidepressants or anti-anxiety medications may be pre-

scribed to help manage depression or anxiety while the gluten-free diet takes effect. Given the interplay between gastrointestinal and mental health symptoms, a comprehensive approach is necessary to diagnose CD and its psychological effects. Healthcare providers should evaluate both the physical and mental health status of individuals with CD. Screening for common mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. Assessing cognitive function through neuropsychological tests if necessary. Approaching potential nutritional deficiencies through laboratory tests and dietary assessments. CD is not only a gastrointestinal disorder but also a condition that can significantly affect mental health. The diagnosis of CD is important for managing both the physical and psychological aspects of the condition. Understanding the interplay between CD and mental health is essential for healthcare providers in offering comprehensive care. With early diagnosis, proper treatment and psychological support, individuals with CD can manage their condition more effectively and improve their overall quality of life.