



NEWS RELEASE

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Going gluten free with celiac disease

*By Lt. Col. Karen E. Hawkins,
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FORT LEE, Va. – Each week customers who have gluten intolerance shop in the commissary and reach out to us about their special dietary needs. In response to the growing concern, customers are now finding more gluten-free foods and products in the commissary, with savings at more than 30 percent. And, to provide more support, an informal gluten-free support group is being created for our customers.

If you have celiac disease, you have gluten intolerance and as many as one in 133 people have it. Among people who have a first-degree relative – a parent, brother or sister, or child – diagnosed with celiac disease, as many as one in 22 people may have the disease, according to a report from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, National Institute of Health.

What is celiac disease?

Having celiac means a person can't eat gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. Gluten is found mainly in foods, but may also be in other products like medicines, vitamins and even the glue on stamps and envelopes, according to the National Institute of Health.

Celiac disease is hereditary, meaning it runs in families. The treatment for celiac disease is a gluten-free diet. Other names for celiac disease are celiac sprue and gluten intolerance. In people with celiac disease, the body's immune system responds to gluten by damaging the lining of the small intestine. This lining has small finger-like growths called villi. The villi

normally absorb nutrients from the foods we eat. When the villi are damaged, the body can't get the nutrients it needs.

People with celiac disease don't always know they have it because they don't feel sick. Or if they feel sick, they don't know celiac disease is the cause.

Celiac disease can be very serious. Besides stomach pain, it can cause anemia, malnutrition, infertility, a certain skin rash and other health problems.

What are the symptoms of celiac disease?

Symptoms of celiac disease include the following:

- gas
- diarrhea
- stomach pain
- feeling very tired
- change in mood
- weight loss
- a very itchy skin rash with blisters
- slowed growth in children

Most people with celiac disease have one or more symptoms, but not all have digestive problems. And, some people with the disease don't have any symptoms. Having one or more of these symptoms does not mean a person has celiac disease because these symptoms can fit many other disorders.

How is celiac disease diagnosed?

Celiac disease can be hard to discover because its symptoms are like many other digestive diseases. People with celiac disease can go untreated for many years, as it has long been under- diagnosed or misdiagnosed. As doctors become more aware of the many varied symptoms of the disease and reliable blood tests become more available, diagnosis rates are increasing.

Blood tests

People with celiac disease have higher-than-normal levels of certain auto antibodies –

proteins that react against the body's own cells or tissues – in their blood. To diagnose celiac disease, doctors will test blood for high levels of antibodies. If test results are negative, but celiac disease is still suspected, additional blood tests may be needed.

Before being tested, one should continue to eat a diet that includes foods with gluten, such as breads and pastas. If a person stops eating foods with gluten before being tested, the results may be negative for celiac disease even if the disease is present. If blood tests and symptoms suggest celiac disease, a biopsy of the small intestine may be conducted to confirm the diagnosis.

How is celiac disease treated?

The only treatment for celiac disease is a gluten-free diet. Those with celiac disease can learn from a dietitian how to read ingredient lists and identify foods that contain gluten in order to make informed decisions at the grocery store and when dining out.

For most people, following this diet will stop symptoms, heal existing intestinal damage, and prevent further damage. Improvement begins within days of starting the diet. The small intestine usually heals in three to six months in children but may take several years in adults. A healed intestine means a person now has villi that can absorb nutrients from food into the bloodstream.

To stay well, people with celiac disease must avoid gluten for the rest of their lives. Eating even a small amount of gluten can damage the small intestine. The damage will occur in anyone with the disease, including people without noticeable symptoms. Depending on a person's age at diagnosis, some problems will not improve, such as short stature and dental enamel defects.

For more information about making healthy choices, visit Ask the Dietitian on <http://www.commissaries.com> and post your questions on the DeCA Dietitian Forum. Be sure to look for other useful information in the Dietitian's Voice archive. Sign up with the DeCA Dietitian on www.twitter.com and get messages sent to your cell phone today. For delicious recipes, check out Kay's Kitchen. And to enjoy all your commissary has to offer, sign up for the *Commissary Connection*.

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About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and*

secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones. Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,400 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America’s military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.