Celiac Disease

Celiac disease is a digestive problem that occurs when the body reacts to gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye. People with celiac disease have an immune system reaction to gluten that damages the small intestine and can lead to digestive symptoms and nutrient deficiencies. The condition is often associated with an increased risk of developing other diseases, including certain types of cancer.

What are the symptoms of celiac disease?

The symptoms of celiac disease can vary widely and may include gastrointestinal and extraintestinal symptoms. Some common symptoms include:

- Diarrhea or loose, bulky stools
- Bloody or mucus-filled stools
- Abdominal pain or cramping
- Constipation
- Malnutrition
- Anemia
- Fatigue or weakness
- Headaches
- Skin rash or itching

How is celiac disease diagnosed?

Celiac disease is diagnosed based on a combination of symptoms, family history, and test results. The Diagnostic Criteria for Celiac Disease guidelines recommend a battery of tests, including:

- Blood tests to measure levels of anti-tissue transglutaminase antibodies (tTG) and anti-endomysial antibodies (EMA)
- Small-intestinal biopsy to evaluate the appearance of the villi in the small intestine

How is celiac disease treated?

Celiac disease is treated with a lifelong, gluten-free diet. This means avoiding all forms of wheat, barley, and rye. The gluten-free diet is very effective in managing celiac disease and can prevent complications such as nutrient deficiencies and osteoporosis.

What are the long-term effects of celiac disease?

Celiac disease is a chronic autoimmune disorder that can cause damage to the small intestine over time. If left untreated, celiac disease can lead to serious complications, including:

- Nutrient deficiencies
- Anemia
- Osteoporosis
- Increased risk of certain types of cancer

Celiac disease can be successfully treated with a gluten-free diet, and most people can live healthy, fulfilling lives with proper management. However, lifelong adherence to the diet is essential to prevent long-term complications.