

# Gastroenterologists study mind/body techniques for treating celiac disease

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For adults and children diagnosed with celiac disease, the only treatment is a gluten-free diet, which can be very challenging. Gastroenterologists at Rush University Medical Center are conducting a new study to see if mind/body techniques could help patients with celiac disease adhere to the very strict diet.

Celiac disease is a lifelong [digestive disease](#) affecting children and adults. People who have celiac disease cannot tolerate gluten, a protein found in almost all food products as well as medicines, vitamins and lip balms. Gluten can damage the small intestine and interfere with absorption of nutrients from food.

"Eating even a small amount of gluten can damage the small intestine," said Dr. Ali Keshavarzian, vice chairman of medicine and gastroenterologist at Rush. "The damage will occur in anyone with the disease, including people without noticeable symptoms."

Hidden sources of gluten are sometimes additives such as modified food starch, preservatives and stabilizers made with wheat. Also, many corn and rice products are produced in factories that also manufacture wheat products, and can be contaminated with wheat gluten.

"The purpose of this study is to determine whether participation in one of two mind/body courses can help patients cope with the restricted diet," said Keshavarzian. "It can be very hard and stressful for people with celiac disease to stick to a gluten-free diet."

In order to heal existing intestinal damage and prevent further damage, individuals diagnosed with Celiac disease must avoid gluten for the rest of their lives. Patients have to be trained by a health professional on how to read ingredient lists and identify foods that contain gluten in order to make informed decisions when grocery shopping or eating out.

"Going to restaurants or dinner at a friend's house can pose dangers to a person with [celiac disease](#)," said Keshavarzian. "It can really impact a person's quality of life."

For most people, following a gluten-free 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.

Provided by Rush University Medical Center

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