

Louisiana Pharmacists Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Louisiana Pharmacists Association Educates Patients about Celiac Disease

Celiac Disease is one of the most undiagnosed diseases in the United States. Currently, 2.5 million Americans are undiagnosed and are at risk for serious long-term complications. It is estimated that 1 in 100 people worldwide are affected by Celiac disease. Celiac disease is a hereditary disease. Ten percent of people with a first degree relative that has Celiac disease will also have the disease. Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder that causes the affected individual to not be able to eat gluten. When people with Celiac disease eat gluten, their body's immune system creates antibodies, which will attack the small intestine and damage the villi, which are the functional unit of the small intestine and are responsible for absorption of nutrients.

There are over 300 documented symptoms of Celiac disease that may affect the gastrointestinal system, or other parts of the body. Some people may experience no symptoms at all. Whether the patient experiences symptoms or not, untreated Celiac disease patients are at risk for long-term complications. The symptoms vary between every patient, though the common ones are diarrhea (one third of patients) and weight loss (one half of patients). Alongside gastrointestinal problems, additional symptoms experienced include: anemia; loss of bone density or softening of bone; itchy, blistering skin rash; damage to dental enamel; headaches and fatigue; and nervous system injury. Some long-term side effects that coincide with untreated Celiac disease include the development of other autoimmune diseases such as Type I Diabetes and Multiple Sclerosis.

The only available treatment for Celiac disease is a lifelong gluten free diet. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. Some foods that include gluten are breads, beer, and pasta.

Ingesting even a small amount of gluten, such as breadcrumbs can trigger the antibodies that damage the intestine. Because trace amounts of gluten can cause a reaction, cross-contamination of foods is also a concern. Any utensils or cookware used to cook gluten-free food should not be used to cook foods that may contain gluten. Foods that are processed in a factory that makes foods that contain gluten are also considered “contaminated.” Packaged foods should be avoided unless they are labeled gluten-free or have no gluten-containing ingredients. Most packaged foods that are processed in a gluten-containing factory will include a disclaimer at the end of the ingredients list, which will state something similar to: “This product was made in a factory which also processes foods including wheat.”

Not only can gluten be found in food, but it is also found in some inactive ingredients in certain medications. Therefore, it is important for all Celiac disease patients to understand not only what foods contain gluten, but also what medications could contain gluten. Pharmacists serve as a valuable and reliable knowledge base regarding the ingredients used in drug manufacturing. Celiac patients are encouraged to seek the assistance of a pharmacist when choosing any over the counter medications or filling any prescriptions.

Resources:

<http://www.celiac.org>

<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/celiac-disease/DS00319>

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The Louisiana Pharmacists Association, established in 1882, strives to promote the interests of all pharmacists of the State of Louisiana. For more information about the LPA and its benefits, contact Julie Fuselier or Phyllis Perron, LPA Co-Executive Directors at 225/346-6883 or visit our website at www.louisianapharmacists.com.

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