

Department of Gastroenterology

The second biopsy

Information for patients attending the Addenbrooke's Coeliac Disease Clinic

What is a biopsy?

- A biopsy is a sample of body tissue. Biopsies of the lining of the intestine provide the best means of diagnosing coeliac disease. They are taken at the time of an 'endoscopy' – using a flexible telescope to visualise the lining of the stomach and upper intestine. The test is quite routine and is carried out as a day case under local anaesthetic or light sedation. Taking the biopsies is totally painless as there are no pain receptors in the intestinal lining.

What biopsies are required to diagnose coeliac disease?

- Some years ago, three intestinal biopsies were considered essential to diagnose coeliac disease:
 - the first demonstrated that there was damage to the intestinal lining,
 - the second was taken after a period of time on a gluten free diet and would show improvement in a coeliac patient
 - the third was after a 'gluten challenge' – deliberately eating gluten to invoke a response – and would show damage to the intestine in a coeliac patient.

However, coeliac disease is very common, and there are very few other conditions that cause similar damage to the intestinal lining. Therefore it became clear that the third biopsy was not necessary. Thereafter most experts agreed that just **two** biopsies were required to diagnose coeliac disease.

Nowadays, the blood test for coeliac disease is so good that many people are questioning whether two biopsies are still required. In some cases they are actually asking whether a biopsy is required at all!

- In Addenbrooke's Hospital, our policy is to repeat the intestinal biopsy after nine months on a gluten free diet. The reasons for this are:

- It provides certain confirmation of the diagnosis of coeliac disease
- Many patients with coeliac disease do not experience symptoms with gluten even though the intestinal lining is damaged. It therefore helps patients to know that they are managing the diet correctly and that the 'disease' is responding to treatment.
- We do not know how much gluten patients with coeliac disease can tolerate in the diet. A repeat biopsy that has shown recovery of the intestine will help patients to know that they are consuming an appropriate diet.
- We recommend including oats in the diet from the outset (see the accompanying information – '**What about Oats**'). If there is no response to the diet on repeat biopsy, then we would recommend removing oats from the diet.
- Some patients with coeliac disease will experience coeliac-like symptoms in later life which may be due to other illnesses. If we do not know how the intestine has responded to a gluten free diet, it may be difficult to correctly identify the cause of such symptoms.
- Rarely, patients may not show any response to a gluten free diet and the intestine may remain damaged. Sometimes these patients have a condition called 'Refractory Coeliac Disease'. Patients with this condition may require additional medication, or to have further tests as they may be at risk of a rare type of cancer. (See the accompanying information sheet – '**Refractory Coeliac Disease**').

How can I find out more information about coeliac disease?

Coeliac UK – the patient support group – is an excellent resource. As well as publishing a booklet of all gluten free food manufacturers and produce, they produce a quarterly magazine – 'Crossed Grain' – and local groups that meet regularly. There is also a very informative website for those with internet access – this can be found at www.coeliacuk.co.uk. The helpline number is 01494 444 8804.

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format:
01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Potete chiedere di ottenere queste informazioni in altre lingue, in stampato grande o in audiocassetta.

Italian

若你需要本信息的繁體中文、大字體或音訊格式的版本，請要求索取。

Cantonese

तमने आ माहिती वीछ भाषाओमां, मोटा अक्षरोमां अथवा सांभली शकाय जेवा माध्यम
(ओडीओ इमेज)मां जेठती छोय तो कृपा करीने पूछो.

Gujarati

تکایہ پرسیار بکے نہ گھر نہ وزانیاریہت دہوی بہ زمانیکی تر , بہ بیٹی گہورہ یانیش بہ شیوہی دہنگ

Kurdish

آگر آپ کو یہ معلومات دوسری زبانوں میں، بڑے الفاظ کی اشاعت میں یا آڈیو ٹیپ پر درکار ہوں تو براۓ مہربانی اس کیلئے درخواست کریں۔

Urdu



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Document history

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