

New Guidelines Mean UK IBS Sufferers Will Be Tested For Coeliac Disease

The symptoms of IBS and coeliac disease can often be very similar as a result the diagnosis of coeliac disease can be delayed or missed and IBS is misdiagnosed.

The new guidelines regarding the diagnosis of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) announced recently by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) could ensure this should no longer happen by introducing new diagnostic criteria, which ensures testing for coeliac disease should be undertaken before a final diagnosis of IBS is made. Patrick Kirby, director of Xtritica, the midland based healthcare company that promotes the Biocard Celiac Test In the UK, an easy to use home screening test which can aid the detection coeliac disease within 15 minutes, says: "We very much welcome these new guidelines which will help to speed up the diagnosis of coeliac disease.

Many of the symptoms are similar to those of IBS, but it is good to know that patients will now be tested automatically for coeliac disease when previously this may have been missed. Hopefully, fewer people will now have to suffer unnecessarily, often for many years, and will avoid enduring serious digestive problems and associated health problems of coeliac disease."

At least one in 100 (1) people in the UK is estimated to suffer from coeliac disease; however, according to a recent study (2), only one in eight cases is actually being diagnosed. Recent research showed that the average length of time taken for someone to be diagnosed with coeliac disease from the onset of symptoms is 13 years (3).

Coeliac disease is not a food allergy but a life long autoimmune disease caused by intolerance to gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye.

For people with coeliac disease, eating gluten damages the lining of the gut, which prevents normal digestion and the absorption of food. There are serious health problems associated with coeliac disease including osteoporosis, bowel cancer and increased risk of other autoimmune diseases. The only treatment is a strict gluten-free diet for life.

Symptoms of coeliac disease range from the mild to the severe and vary between individuals; the disease can present at any stage of life. Symptoms can include bloating, abdominal pain, nausea, constipation, diarrhoea, wind, tiredness, anaemia, headaches, mouth ulcers, recurrent miscarriages, weight loss (but not in all cases), skin problems, depression, joint or bone pain and neurological (nerve related) problems.

Coeliac UK charity estimates that a further 500,000 may have the disease without realising - putting them at risk of associated health problems such as osteoporosis and infertility.

There is no cure or medication for the condition so sufferers must follow a gluten-free diet in order to alleviate symptoms that include bloating, abdominal pain, nausea, constipation, diarrhoea, anaemia, headaches, mouth ulcers and damage to the gut among others.

Recently NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) included in its new guidelines for IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome) sufferers, that patients are entitled to go to their GPs for a range of blood tests to rule out other conditions, primarily coeliac

disease, which is commonly misdiagnosed as IBS.

However, for ease and convenience there is now a home testing kit available that can either be dispensed within the pharmacy by a nurse or pharmacy staff or customers can self-test in the comfort of their own homes.

The Biocard Celiac test is based on a simple concept - coeliac disease is caused by intolerance to gluten. The body reacts by producing antibodies, which damage the intestine and these show up in the blood of a coeliac sufferer. The finger-prick blood test looks for certain antibodies in the blood. Results are rapid - taking just five to 10 minutes to show whether or not someone is gluten intolerant. In an independent trial (Makki, 2006), the test proved 96% accurate compared with hospital-based tests. People who receive a positive result are advised to ask their GP for further tests to confirm the diagnosis.

* Coeliac Awareness Week takes place between May 12-18, 2009. Around 1000 newly diagnosed people are joining Coeliac UK every month.

Priced £19.99, the Biocard Celiac Test is distributed by Xtritica Medical and is now available from Boots and online at <http://www.xtritica.co.uk>

References:

1. Research quoted is from The Economic Burden of Coeliac Disease in the UK research paper
2. Research quoted is from Recent advances in Coeliac Disease by D.A. van Heel and J. West, published in Gut 2006 55, pp 1037-1046
3. Coeliac UK

<http://www.coeliac.co.uk>

Source: Coeliac UK