



## **Gluten Sensitivity and Lyme Disease Symptoms are Similar**

**By Miguel Gonzalez, MD, FACP, FCCP**

October 2012- Lyme disease is a bacterial infection caused by a spirochete medically known as *Borrelia burgdorferi*. It is acquired by humans who are bitten by an infected deer tick. The tick bite is not noticed in 85% of cases because in most cases the immature, tiny form of the tick, the nymphal, is biting and the affected person does not feel any pain and thus will not suspect any source of infection.

Lyme diseases is also called “The Great Imitator” for a reason: it causes a myriad of symptoms that mimic other diseases. One particular condition, gluten sensitivity, is frequently confused with Lyme disease because they share common symptoms.

### **Lyme Disease Symptoms**

In the early stage, lyme disease symptoms include flu-like, non-specific symptoms such as fever, chills, sweats, muscles aches, fatigue, nausea and mild joint pain. The characteristic rash of Lyme disease, called erythema migrans, occurs in only 10% of cases, and Bell’s palsy, the paralysis of the facial nerve, is not common as well. Later on, as the disease progresses, symptoms like headache, stiff neck, light or sound sensitivity, sleeping problems, depressed or anxious mood, fatigue, arthritic pain, abdominal pain with nausea and diarrhea occur as well as memory and concentration issues and cardiac symptoms such as shortness of breath, chest pain and palpitations. Tingling, burning and shooting pains may manifest and are signs of nerve involvement.

In addition to the above symptoms, children may display abnormal behavior, inability to sustain attention, outbursts and mood swings.

### **Gluten Sensitivity and Intolerance**

Celiac disease ,or gluten intolerance, is a medical condition that damages the lining of the small intestine and blocks it from absorbing essential nutrients from food. The damage of the gut is due to a reaction from eating gluten which is found in wheat, barley, rye, and many ready-to-eat, processed foods.

Gluten sensitivity is another condition with similar symptoms as gluten intolerance in which the patient tests negative for celiac disease (based on blood test and biopsy), yet his/her body reacts to wheat and other foods containing gluten. Roughly 1% of the population has been diagnosed with celiac disease. Yet celiac might be only the tip of the iceberg for an emerging problem that includes gluten sensitivity. Gluten sensitivity affects an estimated 10% of the population and is often undiagnosed and therefore untreated.

Similar to those individuals affected by Lyme disease, those affected by gluten sensitivity will experience flu-like symptoms, digestive complaints such as abdominal pain with nausea and diarrhea or constipation, fatigue, depression or anxiety, sleeping issues, problems with memory and concentration, muscle cramps and joint pains, tingling and numbness in their arms or legs. Like children affected by Lyme, children with gluten sensitivity may display the above symptoms as well as an irritable and fussy behavior.

Considering that these two conditions share very similar symptoms, there is no surprise they can get easily confused. In addition, Lyme disease is often treated based on clinical symptoms, before it is confirmed by laboratory studies.

If you have some of the symptoms described above, you should seek medical advice to get the correct diagnosis start the right treatment.

References:

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001280/>

<http://www.webmd.com/digestive-disorders/celiac-disease/features/gluten-intolerance-against-grain?page=2>

[http://www.lymedisease.org/lyme101/lyme\\_disease/lyme\\_symptoms.html](http://www.lymedisease.org/lyme101/lyme_disease/lyme_symptoms.html)