

MEDIA RELEASE

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If you're eating gluten-free but not been diagnosed with coeliac disease, we need to talk.

MELBOURNE: Geelong Pathologist Dr David Clift says hundreds of thousands of Australians should stop treating themselves for a condition they most likely do not have.

Eliminating gluten from the diet is a trend adopted by hundreds of thousands of healthy Australians. But Dr Clift, who diagnoses coeliac disease, says people who decide they need to go gluten-free but do not seek medical advice or proper testing could be risking their health, in some cases with a form of blood cancer.

Five percent of people with Coeliac Disease who routinely consume gluten develop aggressive lymphoma.^{2,3} Gluten can be present in unexpected foods such as processed meats, marinades and spices. Diagnosis and medical support can help people with the condition to adhere to the strict diet.

On average a gluten-free diet for a family of four will be 17% more expensive than a routine diet.¹ There is limited evidence that a gluten-free diet has health benefits for people without coeliac disease. Removing grains from the diet can reduce intake of vital nutrients. In children this may interfere with growth.

Dr Clift is an Ambassador for Pathology Awareness Australia, he also has close relatives with coeliac disease. He says,

“Coeliac disease is not a sliding scale – you either have it or you don’t and the only way to know for sure is to get tested.

Poorly managed Coeliac Disease can lead to bone weakness (osteoporosis), anaemia, muscle wastage and uncommonly but importantly, lymphoma. Most people would be scandalised if their doctor treated them for a disease they did not have. It amazes me that so many are willing to wing it with a serious medical condition.

Symptoms of Coeliac Disease can be similar to ovarian cancer and other gut conditions that require different treatment. You need to diagnose to ensure the correct treatment.”

A study published by Monash University Professor Peter Gibson in 2011 proposed the existence of gluten sensitivity – a coeliac lite version causing symptoms in people without Coeliac Disease. This was popularised by the burgeoning wellness market. However, in 2015, Gibson followed up his findings with two much larger studies that disproved gluten sensitivity existed.

Dr Clift says,

“The internet provides a wealth of speculation about nutritional health but little hard evidence. Some people attribute a gluten-free diet to an improvement in digestive symptoms, but by

cutting out gluten, you could be reducing processed foods and additives that may be the real cause of gut pain.”

ENDS

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Dr Clift is available for interview

References

1. Lambert et al “Cost and affordability of a nutritionally balanced gluten-free diet: Is following a gluten-free diet affordable?” Nutrition and Dietetics Feb 2016
2. O’Farrelly C, Feighery C, O’Brian DJ, et al. “Humoral response to wheat protein in patients with Celiac disease and enteropathy associated T cell lymphoma.” Br Med J (Clin Res Ed) 1986; 293:908-910.
3. Murray A, Cuevas EC, Jones DB, et al. “Study of the immunohistochemistry and T cell clonality of enteropathy associated T cell lymphoma.” Am J Pathol 1995; 146:509-519

Pathology Awareness Australia

The [Know Pathology Know Healthcare](#) initiative is managed by Pathology Awareness Australia which is a not-for-profit company formed to improve understanding and recognition of Australia’s world class pathology services. The company represents 95% of the Australian pathology landscape and comprises the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, private pathology groups, public pathology groups, and manufacturers and suppliers to industry.