

Research Round Up

VITAMINS AND SUPPLEMENTS

that are Important to People with Celiac

By Kelly Ozog

As someone who's navigated the ups and downs of living with an autoimmune disease and gluten intolerance, I know how important it is to stay on top of your nutrition. While following a strict gluten-free diet for those with celiac is crucial, it's also essential to pay attention to the vitamins and supplements that can support your overall health. These supplements can make a big difference, whether ensuring you get enough vitamin D for strong bones, iron to fight fatigue, or magnesium to keep your muscles and nerves functioning well. It's all about filling in the gaps and ensuring your body gets what it needs to thrive. Let's dive into why these nutrients are important and how you can ensure you're getting enough!

Understanding Celiac Disease: What You Need to Know

Celiac disease is a condition where the immune system reacts to gluten—a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye. This reaction affects about 1% of people in the U.S. and can cause damage to the lining of the small intestine. When this happens, the body has a tough time absorbing important nutrients like iron, B vitamins, and fat-soluble vitamins, which are essential for overall health.

Common Symptoms

People with celiac disease might experience symptoms like diarrhea, bloating, stomach discomfort, or constipation. But it doesn't stop there; the condition can also cause extra symptoms beyond the gut, such as fatigue, weight loss, skin rash (dermatitis herpetiformis), iron deficiency, and even osteoporosis.

The Importance of Micronutrients

Micronutrient deficiencies—especially iron, folic acid, vitamins B6 and B12, vitamin D, copper, and zinc—are quite common in people with celiac disease, particularly when newly diagnosed. These deficiencies can lead to issues like neurological problems, mood changes, and bone health concerns if left untreated. That's why the latest guidelines from the American College of Gastroenterology recommends that doctors and dietitians check for these deficiencies early on and consider supplements as needed.

Nutrient Deficiencies in a Gluten-Free Diet

While following a gluten-free diet is essential for managing celiac disease, it can also present nutritional challenges. Gluten-free diets are often low in dietary fiber because they exclude many fiber-rich grains, and many gluten-free products are made with starches or refined flours that lack fiber.

Additionally, gluten-free diets can be low in key vitamins like vitamin D, B12, and folate, as well as minerals like iron, zinc, magnesium, and calcium.

Healthy Gluten-free Choices

To ensure you're getting enough essential nutrients on a gluten-free diet, incorporate naturally gluten-free foods that are high in vitamins and minerals, like fruits, vegetables, protein sources, legumes, quinoa, and gluten-free whole grains such as buckwheat and millet. Since some nutrients can still be lacking even with careful food choices, it's important to include certain supplements.

In addition to following a gluten-free diet, taking vitamin and mineral supplements can help speed up recovery from nutritional deficiencies common in celiac disease. However, it's important to be mindful when choosing supplements, as some inactive ingredients can contain gluten. Always check labels carefully or consult with your healthcare provider to ensure your supplements are completely gluten-free and safe for you.

Many supplement manufacturers process multiple products in their facilities and sometimes use grain-based fillers like wheat germ. Be on the lookout for terms like wheat germ, food starch, maltodextrin, MSG, hydrolyzed vegetable protein, dextrin, and artificial flavors and colors, as these might contain gluten.