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It's Coeliac Awareness Week!

By **FMCG Business** on May 15, 2017 in **News**

To mark Coeliac Awareness Week, Kiwis are being offered a new tool to help them discover if they should be gluten-free.

Coeliac New Zealand General Manager, Dana Alexander, says early diagnosis of coeliac disease, which requires a gluten-free diet, is essential to avoiding potential lifelong chronic illness such as osteoporosis, neurological issues, serious skin rashes, liver disease and infertility.

"It is estimated that 65,000 New Zealanders have coeliac disease, but 80% are unaware that they do, so we are helping people join the dots and consider that coeliac disease may be the cause of their overall unwellness."

The new online tool is being launched during Coeliac Awareness Week from May 15 to 21. The theme this year is 'Consider Coeliac Disease'.

Alexander says the new tool takes people through some simple questions that result in a risk level in relation to coeliac disease. A referral letter for those at risk is provided for people to take to their GP to ensure they get the right tests.



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“Without a diagnosis of what could seem like an unconnected series of symptoms – including nausea and vomiting, lethargy, diarrhoea, irritability and weight loss or gain – people may potentially suffer long term health issues from something that is completely manageable.”

Coeliac disease is a permanent auto-immune disorder that causes a reaction to dietary gluten, which is found in wheat, barley and rye. It causes damage and inflammation in the small intestine meaning key nutrients cannot be absorbed properly.

The good news, Alexander says, is that moving on to a gluten-free diet will restore the small intestine to full function, but the key is getting a diagnosis early to prevent other health issues arising from a prolonged lack of certain kinds of nutrients to all parts of the body.

High Performance Sport New Zealand nutritionist, Kath Fouhy, who is also on the Coeliac New Zealand medical advisory board, says the online tool is a great first step towards diagnosis.

“Before removing gluten from the diet, I encourage people that may be experiencing the symptoms of undiagnosed coeliac disease to take the test with the new online assessment tool as it may assist in the pathway to a confirmed diagnosis,” she says.

Alexander says people who suspect they have coeliac disease need to stay on a normal gluten-containing diet – a gluten free diet should not be started as it will interfere with establishing the correct diagnosis, which is notoriously difficult, but can be achieved initially through doing a blood test and then having confirmation with a small bowel biopsy.

“The only treatment for coeliac disease is to follow a life-long strict gluten free diet, and providing all gluten has been removed from the diet, most people with coeliac disease return to normal health over a period of months, although it can take up to a year,” she says.

During Coeliac Awareness Week Coeliac New Zealand and its partners are running a number of events that aim to get potential coeliacs themselves and health professionals to consider coeliac disease as the underlying cause of persistent ill health.

<http://www.coeliac.org.nz/coeliac-disease/online-assessment>

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