

Celiac Disease and Reduced Risk of Certain Cancers in Women.

Source: *International Journal of Cancer*

Celiac disease (CD) is an autoimmune disorder involving the small intestine. Sufferers of this disease cannot tolerate gluten which is a protein found in foods such as rye, barley, and wheat. When gluten is introduced to a celiac disease patient, the body responds by damaging the small intestine, primarily the villi. Essential nutrients are absorbed into the body by villi, and when this damage occurs, individuals may become malnourished despite the amount of food they consume. This genetic disease can have severe effects on the functioning of the body.

Breast cancer is a cancer that forms in tissues of the breast, usually the ducts (tubes that carry milk to the nipple) and lobules (glands that make milk). It occurs in both men and women, although male breast cancer is rare. Risk factors for breast cancer include gender, age, family history, defective genes, early onset of menstruation, late menopause and late childbearing. Breast cancer is about ninety percent due to genetic abnormalities that happen as a result of the aging process and the “wear and tear” of life in general.

A study published in the *International Journal of Cancer* was undertaken to determine the risk of certain cancers in women with celiac disease. Researchers identified 17,852 women with CD who were diagnosed between 1969 and 2007. They used the Cox regression model to estimate the women’s risk of breast, endometrial and ovarian cancer and the women were then compared to 88,400 age and sex matched controls. The results were women with celiac disease were at a reduced risk for all three cancers. The authors concluded “CD seems to be inversely related not only to breast cancer but also to endometrial and ovarian cancer. Potential explanations include shared risk factors and early menopause.”¹

1 Ludvigsson JF, West J, Ekblom A, et al. Reduced risk of breast, endometrial, and ovarian cancer in women with celiac disease. *Int J Cancer*. Sep2011.