When to Introduce Gluten to Infants

For parents who have celiac disease or who carry the gene for it, introducing gluten to their infants can be nerve-wracking. In this handout, you will learn when parents can introduce gluten into their infant's diet. You will also learn about the results of two studies that support the recommendation.

WHEN SHOULD I RECOMMEND THAT GLUTEN BE ADDED TO AN INFANT’S DIET?

Parents can introduce gluten into their infant’s diet any time after 4 months of age. This is also when infants can typically start to try solid foods regardless of their risk of developing celiac disease.

WHICH PARENTS SHOULD I RECOMMEND THIS TO?

You can make this recommendation to parents who have celiac disease. You can also make this recommendation to parents who have other children who are diagnosed with celiac disease.

WILL THE TIMING OF GLUTEN INTRODUCTION INTO THE INFANT’S DIET INCREASE THEIR RISK OF DEVELOPING CELIAC DISEASE?

The majority of infants at risk for celiac disease will not develop celiac disease. There is currently no data to suggest that the timing of gluten introduction alters this risk.

DOES BREASTFEEDING PROTECT AGAINST CELIAC DISEASE?

No. Breastfeeding provides many benefits to the mother and infant, but there is no evidence that it prevents or protects the infant from developing celiac disease.

WHICH RESEARCH SUPPORTS THE RECOMMENDATION TO INTRODUCE GLUTEN AT 4 MONTHS OF AGE OR LATER?

There are two studies that support this recommendation:

  
  This study followed 500 infants in Italy who had a first-degree relative diagnosed with celiac disease and a genetic predisposition to develop the disease. Researchers found that introducing gluten into an infant’s diet at 12 months slightly delayed, but did not prevent, the onset of celiac disease. In this study, the same number of infants in each group (with varying timing of gluten introduction) developed celiac disease by age 5.

  
  This study (also called the European PreventCD study) followed 944 infants who had a first-degree relative diagnosed with celiac disease and a genetic predisposition for the disease. Researchers found that introducing small amounts of gluten at 4-6 months of age did not contribute to the development of celiac disease. A similar number of infants in both groups developed celiac by age 3.

Ongoing Research

The Center for Celiac Research and Treatment is currently enrolling infants less than 6 months of age with a first-degree relative with celiac disease for a prospective study that will address how environmental factors, such as infant diet, might contribute to the development of celiac disease.

Visit www.cdgemm.org for more information.