

# Preface

*In the name of Allah, most Beneficent, most Merciful*

I have an interest in celiac disease, both professionally and personally. As a paediatric gastroenterologist, I have had extensive experience in dealing with children with celiac disease and their families. On the personal side, some of my close family relatives have celiac disease, providing me with a first-hand opportunity to see the impact of this disorder on everyday living. Of all the gastrointestinal disorders that I have encountered in my clinical practice, none has been more fascinating than celiac disease. However, despite working in this field for quite some time, I consider myself not an expert in celiac disease but rather a student, learning new things from patients all the time.

Awareness of celiac disease amongst health professionals is generally poor and the reasons for this are discussed in the book. Most do not realize that the clinical pattern of celiac disease has changed and many patients do not present with the classical malabsorptive picture. Hence, it is not surprising that delays in diagnosis are common.

Over the years, my academic career has evolved around developing educational strategies to improve awareness of celiac disease in both the public arena and the health profession. This motivation came after noticing the changing face of celiac disease and the long delays that many patients have to endure before being diagnosed.

The health care system in Pakistan faces challenges on several fronts. Infectious diseases are rampant and end up consuming significant resources. It is, therefore, not surprising that disorders like celiac disease are not getting due attention. Also, celiac disease is generally not viewed as a serious or life

threatening illness. It is true that a very effective treatment, the gluten-free diet, is available for this condition. However, celiac disease is a serious disorder. Undiagnosed or poorly treated celiac disease carries a significant morbidity and even mortality. Delays in diagnosis also carry a heavy economic burden to society as patients go through multiple assessments and investigations.

There have been several books written on celiac disease and the gluten-free diet from around the world. To my knowledge, there has been none in Pakistan. The books from foreign countries have several limitations. On the medical side, disease patterns and availability of diagnostic testing and management facilities vary in different countries. The health care infrastructure and economic realities of each country are unique. It is therefore difficult to extrapolate information and recommendations from those books and apply them to the population of Pakistan. On the dietary front, books on gluten-free recipes are written in the context of the Western diet with ingredients and equipment that are neither available nor applicable to our traditional cooking and cuisine. Furthermore, the cost of buying these foreign books is prohibitive for an average person in our country. A lot of information on celiac disease is similarly available on the internet but suffers from the same limitations and access to the web is not widely available in Pakistan yet.

It was these considerations that led me to write this book on celiac disease and the gluten-free diet. This book is targeted to both patients and health professionals. By health professionals, one implies medical trainees, general physicians, specialists including gastroenterologists, nurses and dietitians. The general public, including relatives of patients with celiac disease, and those involved in government, agriculture and the food industry may also find this information helpful. Since the intended readership is so diverse, it has been challenging to

maintain a balance in the language and content of the book. The wording has to be straightforward enough with minimal medical jargon to be understood by a lay person but precise enough to maintain its scientific validity. I hope readers will find the information both educational and enjoyable.

Complimentary copies of this book will be distributed to physicians and medical trainees. For the general public, the retail cost will be kept to a minimum. To keep the price affordable to buyers of all backgrounds, the author will forgo any personal honorarium from the sale of the book.

It is also realized that English is not the primary language of our country. Since the material deals with a medical disorder and all its complexities, it was necessary to assemble the information in English first. It is hoped that, *insha'Allah* (God willing), an Urdu version of this book will be available in the near future.

The ultimate goal of this book is to help patients with celiac disease by providing them with all the necessary information and to improve awareness of this disorder in the medical community which in turn will lead to timely diagnosis. It must be emphasized that this book should not replace a medical diagnosis. Individuals who think they might have celiac disease should consult their physicians. Self-diagnosis is not recommended. Furthermore, the information contained in the book is current at this time but may change as new scientific discoveries are made.

I would welcome any comments and suggestions by the readers. This will help improve the future editions of the book.

Finally, I pray to Allah *subhana wata'aala* (God Almighty) to accept this humble endeavor and through His mercy and blessing make this book a source of benefit for others. Even if one individual derives benefit from this book, I will consider my efforts worthwhile.

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