Lack of awareness about gluten intolerance in India

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New Delhi, 23 June 2017: Consumption of wheat-based products is a common phenomenon in a majority of Indian households. However, if you happen to feel lighter and less bloated by skipping wheat for few days, chances are you may be suffering from gluten intolerance. According to studies, about 10% of the Indian population suffers from gluten intolerance. Research shows that if left untreated, this condition can further lead to a heart disease or even intestinal cancer.

Gluten intolerance occurs when gluten, a protein found in wheat, provokes an adverse reaction from the cells lining the stomach. Based on the severity, type, and genomic predisposition of this disease, a person may have a wheat allergy or celiac disease (a condition in which a person is completely gluten intolerant). This condition can impact both children and adults. It can also be passed on genetically if either parent suffers from this condition.

Speaking about this, Padma Shri Awardee Dr K K Aggarwal, National President Indian Medical Association (IMA) and President Heart Care Foundation of India (HCFI) and Dr RN Tandon – Honorary Secretary General IMA in a joint statement, said "Indians mostly perceive gluten insensitivity as a Western disease, one reason why it has never been taken seriously in India. There is also a lack of awareness about this disease due to which it remains undiagnosed for the major part. Gluten allergy, unlike traditional allergies, cannot be pinned down as its onset is gradual with symptoms that may resemble other conditions: headaches, stomach cramps, bloating, anxiety, depression, and so on. Gluten can gradually erode the villi in the small intestine and prohibit the body from absorbing nutrients from food. Unlike olden days, we consume new strains of wheat today and modern hexaploid wheat has highly antigenic glutens, which is capable of introducing celiac disease."

According to research, gluten intolerance has also been found to worsen asthma, skin irritation, and rashes, as also affect menstrual cycles in women. It is imperative to recognize these symptoms and opt for a gluten intolerance test in time to prevent future complications like cancer and other chronic diseases.

Adding further, Dr Aggarwal, said, "Two genes in the body, DQ2 or DQ8 of the HLA molecules, can help in identifying gluten intolerance or the risk for celiac disease. DNA test analysis can help in...
improving the understanding of symptoms, their triggers, and food habits that need to be changed to prevent the disease from aggravating. It is a good idea to identify the risk early so that corrective measures can be taken in time and one can live a healthier life with fewer problems.

Having gluten intolerance does not mean one cannot enjoy wheat-based product ever again. It is possible to slowly reintroduce several wheat products over time so long as they are not part of the staple diet. Switching to a gluten-free diet is a big change and can take some time for a person to get used to. There are many naturally gluten-free foods which are also healthy and delicious. Some of these include the following.

- Beans, seeds and nuts in their natural, unprocessed form
- Fresh eggs
- Fresh meats, fish and poultry (not breaded, batter-coated or marinated)
- Fruits and vegetables
- Most dairy products

-Ends-

About IMA: Indian Medical Association is the only representative, national voluntary organization of Doctors of Modern Scientific System of Medicine, which looks after the interest of doctors as well as the well being of the community at large. It has its Headquarter in Delhi and State / Terr. Branches in 30 States and Union Territories. It has over 2, 60,000 doctors as its members through more than 1765 active local branches spread across the country.

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