Celiac Disease and Thyroid Disease: The Connection
Researchers have found autoimmune thyroid diseases to be more common in people with CD than in the general population. The reasons for this relationship are not clear, but these are the facts we do know:
- It is likely CD and thyroid disease will occur together because they are both common autoimmune diseases.
- There is evidence CD may predispose individuals to develop other autoimmune diseases, such as thyroid disease.
- Thyroid disease is often diagnosed before CD; physicians may test for thyroid disease more than CD because it is so common.

What does the thyroid gland do?
Your thyroid is a small gland just below your Adam’s apple. This gland produces thyroid hormones whose main job is to regulate metabolism. These hormones affect every system in our body and help to control its functions, for example, temperature regulation.

Thyroid Disease
If your thyroid gland stops producing adequate amounts of hormones it causes your whole body to slow down. This is called hypothyroidism. If your thyroid begins to over-produce hormones it causes your metabolism to significantly increase. This is called hyperthyroidism. Hashimoto’s disease and Grave’s Disease are two common causes of hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism (respectively). Both are autoimmune diseases: autoimmune disease basically means your body’s immune system is attacking its own tissues.

Grave’s Disease
- Your Body’s immune system attacks the thyroid and causes it to produce too many thyroid hormones (hyperthyroidism).
- Hyperthyroidism is not as common as hypothyroidism.
- Common Symptoms:
  - Weight Loss
  - Rapid pulse
  - Protruding eyes
  - Feeling too warm
  - Nervousness
  - Insomnia
  - Irritability
  - Heart palpitations
  - Diarrhea
  - Muscle weakness
Hashimoto’s Disease (Also called Chronic Lymphocytic Thyroiditis)

- Your body’s immune system attacks the thyroid which causes a decrease in production of thyroid hormone (hypothyroidism).
- You may have hypothyroidism and not experience any symptoms for years until your body becomes overstressed, i.e. after a pregnancy or a traumatic illness.
- Symptoms can be very subtle and nonspecific, mimicking other illnesses, so it is important to get a TSH thyroid test if you experience any of the following symptoms:
  - Tiredness
  - Weight gain
  - Dry skin
  - Often feeling cold and low body temperature
  - Coarse, dry hair or hair loss
  - Enlarged thyroid gland in the neck
  - High cholesterol
  - Dizziness
  - Depression
  - Muscle cramps
  - Constipation
  - Decreased concentration or difficulty remembering things
  - Slowed heartbeat
  - Yellowish skin
  - Nausea
  - Lack of coordination

Testing for Thyroid Function

- It is recommended that people have their TSH (thyroid stimulating hormone) measured once a year. This is currently the best screening test for thyroid function. After receiving a patient’s results, doctors may want to do more specific thyroid tests to determine whether the problem is of autoimmune origin.
- If a person is diagnosed with hypothyroidism, the doctor will prescribe a thyroid hormone replacement. There are different strengths of hormone replacement, so finding the right dosage may take some time.
- Treatment for hyperthyroidism is more complex. It usually is treated with antithyroid drugs, but if the condition persists radioactive iodine or surgery may be needed.
- If you do not respond positively to any thyroid hormone treatment, discuss testing for CD with your doctor, as you may be malabsorbing the medication.

Hypothyroidism and the Gluten-Free Diet (GF)

- Some patients with CD have reported a lower need for thyroid hormone replacement after being on the GF diet for a period of time.
- What is the reason for this? One reason is that the GF diet allows the small intestine to heal, and therefore thyroid medication may be better absorbed. The GF diet may also cause a lower inflammatory response and reduce the inflammation of the thyroid gland.