

Autoimmune Connection

An upclose look at celiac disease and rheumatic disorders

INTERVIEW BY MAUREEN STANLEY, DELIGHT ASSOCIATE EDITOR



Is there a connection between **celiac disease** and other **autoimmune disorders**? This summer *Delight* met with Dr. Alexander Shikhman, CEO & Founder of the Institute for Specialized Medicine (ISM), a state-of-the-art integrative care center for autoimmune disease and arthritis treatment to learn more about this important topic.

DGF: Should individuals who have been diagnosed with celiac disease be tested for other autoimmune disorders?

Dr. Shikhman: Yes. Celiac disease can trigger a chain of immunological and metabolic events eventually causing certain chronic inflammatory and autoimmune diseases. The overall prevalence of autoimmune disease in individuals suffering from celiac disease is quite high and by my estimation is in the vicinity of 20-30%. It is much easier to treat gluten-driven autoimmune diseases at their early stages compared to the advanced ones when the diet as a solo therapeutic approach is not sufficient enough. Therefore, it is my strong suggestion to screen all patients with celiac disease for coexistent autoimmune/chronic inflammatory diseases. The extent of the screening depends on the results of an individual's medical history, physical examination as well as experience of the treating physician.

DGF: What rheumatic diseases are commonly associated with celiac disease? Can you explain the connection?

Dr. Shikhman: There are certain rheumatic diseases which are strongly associated with celiac disease. These include Sjogren's syndrome, dermatomyositis, certain subtypes of lupus, Hashimoto disease of the thyroid gland, diabetes type I, autoimmune hepatitis, osteopenia/osteoporosis, certain subsets of psoriasis and psoriatic arthritis, calcium pyrophosphate deposition disease also known as pseudogout, fibromyalgia or chronic myofascial pain among others.

DGF: There are several non-rheumatic diseases associated with celiac disease. What are the types of non-rheumatic diseases and how are they linked with celiac disease?

Dr. Shikhman: In predisposed individuals, gluten can affect any particular organ or system of organs. The list of diseases can really be endless, but some include: endometriosis and infertility, interstitial cystitis, irritable bowel syndrome, fatty liver, lymphoma, colon cancer, hypothyroidism, adrenal insufficiency, attention deficit disorder, bipolar disorder, autism and schizophrenia.

DGF: In 2008, you founded the ISM where you combine the best of traditional and alternative therapies. How is holistic therapy beneficial to patients when combined with traditional therapy? What types of holistic-based care can those of us with gluten-intolerance practice?

Dr. Shikhman: The efficient care of chronic diseases cannot rely solely on traditional drug-based therapy; an integrative approach is a must. The integrative approach has already demonstrated its power in the management of cardiovascular diseases, metabolic disorders, and neurological and mental illnesses through lifestyle and diet modifications.

The benefit to patients is the combination of symptom management and identification of the underlying cause. In traditional rheumatology, diseases are typically treated by managing symptoms; whereas, our approach seeks to identify and eliminate the specific disease triggers. Triggers can include: foods, infectious agents, heavy metals, molds etc. This allows our patients to better understand why their disease is happening and if possible, what they can do to avoid the triggers.

Learn more about Dr. Shikhman and the Institute for Specialized Medicine at <http://www.ifsmed.com>.