

18/12/23

Dear ITV Team,

Re: Concerns regarding advice on coeliac disease, on This Morning, aired 18/12/23

We are the national charity for people with coeliac disease and are writing to express our deep concern regarding the advice given to the caller who is attending a Christmas family event where all food is going to be gluten free to ensure the safety of a person with coeliac disease. The concern raised centred around the 'fussy' dietary needs of the caller's 15 year old son not being met, and although details were not given around this (and may well be valid) it was the ill-informed advice and dismissive tone towards coeliac disease and its severity that prompted this letter of complaint.

Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune condition where gluten consumption triggers an immune response, causing damage to the gut lining, nutrient malabsorption, and a range of potential health complications. Consumption of even a crumb of gluten can cause severe symptoms including vomiting and extreme pain, lasting for several days. And continued consumption, can result in many more severe symptoms and the development of complications, including osteoporosis, and in rare cases small bowel cancer. It's important to stress that coeliac disease is not an allergy or a mere food preference but a medically diagnosed condition that requires strict adherence to a gluten free diet for life.

The remarks made, equating coeliac disease with triviality, and dismissing its severity by comparing it to a peanut allergy, were disheartening and detrimental to the understanding of this condition within the public domain. Coeliac disease affects approximately 1 in 100 individuals, and the impact of even minimal gluten exposure can have both immediate symptoms and long-term health implications.

Furthermore, suggesting that the visitor should 'put up with' adhering to a gluten free diet for the occasion, rather than acknowledging the essential dietary needs of the individual managing coeliac disease, undermines the seriousness of the condition and disregards the significant physical and mental health concerns involved in adhering to a gluten free diet. Although the presenters attempted to highlight the importance of cross contamination, this was swiftly dismissed by Ms Feltz which further trivialised this serious condition. Cross contamination is a critical concern for individuals managing coeliac disease due to the adverse effects of even trace amounts of gluten.

It is our hope that discussions on mainstream platforms like This Morning would promote accurate and empathetic understanding of coeliac disease, emphasising the importance of respect and accommodation for dietary needs, rather than downplaying its significance.

Coeliac UK is committed to raising awareness, providing support, and advocating for the needs of those affected by coeliac disease, including the nearly half a million undiagnosed individuals in the UK.

We would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this matter further and provide accurate information about coeliac disease to ensure a more informed discussion in the future. In the meantime, we ask that you provide an apology to people with coeliac disease on air, to correct the contemptuous and disparaging misinformation included in your programme.

Yours sincerely,

Coeliac UK