



Press release

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MARKS & SPENCER ANNOUNCED AS CHARITY PARTNER FOR COELIAC UK'S IS IT COELIAC DISEASE? AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Coeliac UK, the national charity for people with coeliac disease today, 6 April 2016, announces Marks & Spencer will be supporting its charity campaign for the next three years to help raise awareness of coeliac disease to find the missing half a million people in the UK who are currently undiagnosed.

Coeliac UK's Awareness campaign 'Is it coeliac disease?' kicks off on 9 May 2016 to highlight the wide range of symptoms people might be suffering with, without realising that they could have undiagnosed coeliac disease which can lead to a number of complications including osteoporosis, fertility problems and, in rare cases, small bowel cancer if left undiagnosed and untreated.

Coeliac disease is not an allergy or an intolerance but a serious autoimmune disease where the body's immune system damages the lining of the small bowel when gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye, is eaten. There is no cure and no medication; the only treatment is a strict gluten-free diet for life.

One in 100 people in the UK has coeliac disease, with the prevalence rising to one in ten for close family members. However, current statistics show only 24% of those with the condition are diagnosed, leaving an estimated half a million people in the UK undiagnosed.

This year the charity is focusing on those that have recurring or unexplained anaemia, caused by iron deficiency, as this is one of the key symptoms found in those who have undiagnosed coeliac disease. In early May, Coeliac UK will be announcing new survey findings relating to anaemia and coeliac disease.

Other symptoms people need to be aware of include frequent bouts of diarrhoea, stomach pain and cramping, regular mouth ulcers, ongoing fatigue, lots of gas and bloating, nausea and vomiting.

The charity's online assessment www.isitcoeliacdisease.org.uk allows people to answer a handful of questions about their symptoms and they will then be advised if they should go to their GP to be screened. Since the assessment was launched under a year ago, over 30,000 people

have taken the questionnaire. The initial results suggest that around 10% of those who were recommended to seek advice went on to be diagnosed with coeliac disease.

In addition to financial support Marks & Spencer is also offering its stores as locations across the country for Coeliac UK's national leafleting day on Saturday 14 May where Members of the charity will be raising awareness of coeliac disease.

Sarah Sleet, chief executive of Coeliac UK said: "We are thrilled to have Marks & Spencer on board and their support will be invaluable in helping us reach out to the hundreds of thousands of people who are still to be diagnosed. I would urge anyone who is suffering with symptoms to complete the online assessment and start their diagnosis journey."

Claire Hughes, Head of Nutrition for M&S said "We are delighted to be in partnership with Coeliac UK and look forward to working with them on their campaign. It's important to us that the public are made more aware of the symptoms of coeliac disease so that more people can get the diagnosis and support that they need. Our product teams work hard to ensure that we have a wide range of gluten-free foods with the same great taste and flavour that you would expect from M&S."

Although the gluten-free diet is the only treatment for the condition it is essential that no one removes gluten from their diet until the full diagnosis has been completed as you have to be consuming it every day for six weeks for an accurate blood test to be taken.

Ends

Notes to the Editor

- Coeliac disease is a serious illness where the body's immune system reacts to gluten found in food, making the body attack itself.
- A wide range of case studies are available on request from Coeliac UK.
- Gluten is a protein found in wheat (including spelt), rye and barley. Some people are also sensitive to oats. Obvious sources of gluten include breads, pastas, flours, cereals, cakes and biscuits. It is often used as an ingredient in many favourite foods such as fish fingers, sausages, gravies, sauces and soy sauce.
- Average time to diagnosis is 13 years
- 1 in 4 people diagnosed with coeliac disease had previously been diagnosed with IBS
- Coeliac UK has a Helpline on 0333 332 2033 and further information can be found at www.coeliac.org.uk