

News Release

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MasterChef champion Jane Devonshire announced as charity ambassador to head up coeliac disease in children campaign

Coeliac UK announces Jane Devonshire, champion of MasterChef 2016, as its new ambassador who will spearhead the national charity's 2020 campaign to help find thousands of children living with undiagnosed coeliac disease.

Jane's youngest son Ben was diagnosed with coeliac disease when he was just two years old. She said: "I was absolutely thrilled to be asked to be an ambassador for Coeliac UK because raising awareness of coeliac disease especially for children, is a cause close to my heart. I've seen first-hand the difference that early diagnosis can make and I want to help the charity reach more parents and carers who might be struggling and searching, sometimes for many years, to find answers to their child's ill health."

Symptoms of undiagnosed coeliac disease in children include:

- diarrhoea and other unexplained gut symptoms
- faltering growth or unexpected weight loss
- dental enamel defects
- and a bloated tummy

Parents might also notice symptoms, which are out of character for their child, such as extreme tiredness and changes in mood and irritability, as they struggle with feeling ill.

Average time to diagnosis is 13 years, which Coeliac UK wants to change. If left untreated, coeliac disease can lead to a number of serious complications later in life, including: anaemia, osteoporosis, unexplained infertility, neurological conditions such as gluten ataxia and neuropathy and, although rare, there is an increased risk of small bowel cancer and intestinal lymphoma.

Coeliac disease is not an allergy or an intolerance but an 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.

1 in 100 people in the UK is estimated to have coeliac disease but of these, only 30% are diagnosed, meaning there are nearly half a million people in the UK with undiagnosed coeliac disease.

Chief executive of Coeliac UK, Hilary Croft said: “We are delighted to welcome Jane as our new ambassador. She has always been a great friend to the charity and is the perfect person to rally support around our children’s campaign in 2020. With her help, we hope to increase diagnosis rates by encouraging all parents, grandparents or carers who are seeing symptoms like faltering growth, unexpected weight loss or a bloated tummy in their child to go to their GP and ask for a blood test for coeliac disease.”

Coeliac UK’s online assessment www.coeliac.org.uk/isitcoeliacdisease, based on the NICE guideline NG20, gives people greater confidence to seek further medical advice from their GP. Upon completion of the assessment, the respondent will receive an email with their results, which will indicate whether their symptoms are potentially linked to coeliac disease. However, it is essential to keep eating gluten until all tests are completed as otherwise these tests may give a false negative result.

Coeliac UK Awareness Week 11-17 May 2020 – further campaign details, case studies to follow.

Ends

For more information, please contact
Kate Newman kate.newman@coeliac.org.uk

Notes to Eds:

1. Coeliac UK is the national charity for people who need to live without gluten, whether due to coeliac disease or another medical condition requiring a gluten free diet.
2. Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune condition where the body’s immune system reacts to gluten found in food, making the body attack itself.
3. 1 in 100 people in the UK has coeliac disease but half a million people in the UK are undiagnosed.
4. Average time to diagnosis is 13 years.
5. A wide range of case studies are available on request from Coeliac UK
6. Gluten is a protein found in wheat (including spelt), rye and barley. Some people are also sensitive to oats.
7. Coeliac UK has a Helpline on 0333 332 2033 and further information can be found at www.coeliac.org.uk