

Press release

Date: 2nd April 2020

Coeliac UK launches appeal to keep support going for thousands with autoimmune disease

National charity Coeliac UK has launched an appeal so it can continue to support its vulnerable community during this time of crisis.

Due to Coronavirus, people with coeliac disease are relying on Coeliac UK more than ever and the charity has had a massive increase in demand for its services. Research based information and support has never been more important, and the charity is working with its networks of experts to guide its community with accurate advice. The charity is also uniquely placed with an extensive network within the food industry and inroads to Government to lobby for better provision of gluten free food for those who need it most because it is the only treatment for their condition.

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 has coeliac disease but only 30% of those with the condition have been diagnosed. There are an estimated half a million people in the UK who have the condition yet don't know it.

Like many charities, Coeliac UK is suffering at this unprecedented time. It receives no government funding, and existence depends on membership, fundraising, such as the postponed London Marathon, and commercial income through food safety schemes, advertising and sponsorship, which are all at risk as businesses try and weather the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis.

Hilary Croft, Chief Executive of Coeliac UK said: "It won't be a surprise to hear that all of these income streams are under threat due to the coronavirus crisis and at a time we are seeing a surge in demand for our services which are more vital than ever. We are working hard with our network of health and food professionals to collaborate, share knowledge and find the answers

to support our community at a time when they need us most. On average, it costs £33.40 for each enquiry we receive – of which we have received over 10,000 in a fortnight from our social media community alone. Whilst our Helpline costs £500 a day or £62.50 an hour to run.”

“For over 50 years Coeliac UK has provided information and support to thousands of people diagnosed or suffering with symptoms. We’re now worried about the outlook, and how we can stay around to keep helping people now and in the future. We need support more than ever to sustain our work.”

The appeal is asking people to help donate in order to enable the charity to be there now and tomorrow, providing specialist support for coeliacs and those who need to live gluten free – not just for now but for as long as it takes to find a cure.

To donate go to: <https://www.coeliac.org.uk/save-our-future/>

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For further information, please contact:

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Notes to editors:

- Coeliac disease is a serious illness where the body’s immune system reacts to gluten found in food, making the body attack itself.
- 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.
- 1 in 100 people in the UK has coeliac disease but half a million people in the UK are undiagnosed.
- Average time to diagnosis is 13 years
- 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.
- The symptoms of coeliac disease range from mild to severe and can vary between individuals. Not everyone with coeliac disease experiences gut related symptoms; any area of the body can be affected.
- Coeliac UK has a Helpline on 0333 332 2033 and further information can be found at www.coeliac.org.uk