Incidence of childhood coeliac disease and transient gluten intolerance move discrepantly in UK and Sweden

Sir,

Current criteria for the diagnosis of childhood coeliac disease were formulated by the European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition. Coeliac disease was defined as a lifelong disorder in which the small intestinal mucosa is abnormal as a result of exposure to gluten in the diet. The mucosal damage improves on treatment with a gluten free diet but recurs within two years of reintroduction of gluten. In some cases, however, this gluten challenge does not bring about a mucosal relapse within the two year period. These children have so-called transient gluten intolerance. In an earlier study we reported an incidence of transient gluten intolerance of 19% among children with an initial flat small intestinal mucosa that resembled that seen in coeliac disease.1

Since 1975 the incidence of coeliac disease seems to have decreased sharply in the UK2 while the high incidence in Sweden has remained unchanged. On the other hand, we have observed a steep decline in the number of children with transient gluten intolerance diagnosed during the same period. This is in accordance with the findings of Walker-Smith who reported no new cases of transient gluten intolerance in children born after 1975 at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children.3

The fact that the incidences of childhood coeliac disease and transient gluten intolerance are moving discrepantly in the United Kingdom and Sweden is interesting but puzzling, and suggests that factors other than gluten ingestion are involved in the pathogenesis of coeliac disease.

References


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