



PIC QUESTION OF THE WEEK: 11/01/04

Q: Is Celexa[®] (20mg) gluten-free? Can it be used in a patient with celiac disease?

A: Celiac disease (celiac sprue, non-tropical sprue, gluten-sensitive enteropathy) is an auto-immune disorder primarily affecting the duodenum. The disease affects up to 1% of Americans and is often misdiagnosed as irritable bowel syndrome. It has been diagnosed in children as young as 4 months of age. Celiac patients are genetically intolerant to gluten, a generic term used to define a number of proteins found in wheat, rye, and barley. Ingestion of gluten by these patients stimulates an inflammatory immune response that damages the intestinal tract, resulting in impaired nutrient absorption, diarrhea, weight loss, and a variety of other signs/symptoms. After diagnosis of celiac disease, patients must follow a gluten-free diet for life. Although food is the primary source of gluten, many pharmaceuticals include inactive ingredients that contain these proteins. Even the smallest amounts of gluten in tablets and capsules can trigger this destructive process in some patients with celiac disease. The “inactive ingredients” section of the product information for prescription and OTC drugs may be helpful to determine whether gluten protein is included in the formulation. There are several websites that maintain lists of gluten-free pharmaceuticals. In many cases, it is necessary to contact the manufacturer to determine whether a specific product contains gluten. Celexa[®] (20mg) is a gluten-free product and considered safe in patients with celiac disease.

References:

Celiac.com. Gluten-free medicines. <http://www.celiac.com> (accessed 10/27/04)
Celiac Disease Resources. Pharmacist's Letter/Prescriber's Letter 2004; 20(11):201115.
Farrell RJ, et al. Celiac sprue. N Engl J Med 2002;346:180-7.

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