

Clinic offers a comprehensive approach to immune-mediated digestive diseases



Through collaboration among Pediatric Gastroenterology, Allergy & Immunology, and Nutrition, the new Pediatric Celiac Disease & Eosinophilic Esophagitis Clinic at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA offers comprehensive patient-centered care for children across a wide range of immune-mediated digestive diseases. It is the only multidisciplinary clinic of its kind in Southern California.

Immune-mediated digestive diseases

Celiac disease (CD) and eosinophilic esophagitis (EoE) are two of the more common allergic and immune-mediated digestive diseases among a diverse group of conditions that affect the gastrointestinal (GI) tract. These disorders, which often develop in early childhood and require a lifetime of vigilant management, have been on the rise over the past decade although the underlying pathogenesis remains poorly understood. Symptoms can be nonspecific, and a lack of targeted testing and clinical biomarkers cause the disorders to often go unrecognized or misdiagnosed.

CD, affecting approximately one in 100 children, can appear at any age after gluten — the protein found in wheat, rye and barley — is introduced into the diet. Classic symptoms include poor weight gain, diarrhea and anemia, but some children may have constipation, bloating or no symptoms at all. Although it is a lifelong condition, CD is manageable with a gluten-free diet.

Treating a wide range of disorders

“Our team designed this clinic to treat a wide range of allergic and immune-mediated gastrointestinal diseases,” says Laura Wozniak, MD, MS, co-director of the UCLA Pediatric Celiac Disease & Eosinophilic Esophagitis Clinic and assistant clinical professor of pediatric gastroenterology. “These conditions can be quite variable in terms of symptoms and management, which makes it important to involve an experienced, multidisciplinary team. UCLA is one of only a few centers across the country with a dedicated team to do just that.”

The Pediatric Celiac Disease & Eosinophilic Esophagitis Clinic at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA sees patients with a wide range of disorders including:

- Celiac disease and gluten sensitivity
- Eosinophilic esophagitis and gastroenteritis
- Food allergy and food sensitivity
- Food protein-induced enterocolitis syndrome (FPIES)
- Food protein intolerance (e.g., cow's milk protein intolerance)
- Gastrointestinal complications associated with primary or secondary immunodeficiency

EoE is a chronic inflammatory disorder of the esophagus triggered primarily by food allergens. It is the most common of a group of diseases characterized by an increased number of eosinophils — white blood cells — in the GI tract. EoE occurs in about one person in 1,000. EoE symptoms can be mistaken for gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). Younger children may present with abdominal pain, poor feeding and failure to thrive while adolescents tend to have dysphagia (difficulty swallowing).

Optimal diagnosis and treatment depends on multidisciplinary care

Our clinic physicians are experts in their respective specialties and bring years of experience in managing these disorders and working with patients and their families to provide skilled diagnosis, leading-edge treatment interventions and personalized, ongoing care.

Diagnosis — Equipped with state-of-the-art technology, the Pediatric Celiac Disease & Eosinophilic Esophagitis Clinic uses a team-based approach to provide patients with timely and accurate diagnosis in a single convenient location.

- **Gastroenterology:** Endoscopy with biopsies is commonly needed to diagnose immune-mediated digestive diseases as well as other diagnostic modalities including breath testing, motility studies and radiologic exams.
- **Allergy & Immunology:** Evaluation often includes food-allergy skin testing as well as blood testing in an effort to understand the contribution of food allergens to a patient's underlying condition.
- **Nutrition:** For cases in which food allergens are a significant contributor to the disease, careful dietary elimination and food reintroduction can be used to identify the relevant allergens.

Treatment — There is currently no cure for most immune-mediated digestive diseases. Treatment and management include care regimens tailored to help each patient and family manage the specific disease. Clinic physicians consider use of a wide array of therapies including pre- and probiotics, dietary changes and medications.

Our clinic has assembled a caring team of professionals who take the time to listen and thoroughly understand our young patients' complicated health issues and concerns. Because these conditions can significantly affect the lives of patients and their families, we provide education and support to help them deal with all the medical, nutritional and social issues.

Team members, working closely with patients, their families and referring physicians, conduct weekly interdisciplinary conferences to discuss each patient's needs, treatment and progress and to coordinate a care plan designed to offer the best outcome.

UCLA researchers are interested in studying the dynamic interplay between nutritional factors, the immune system and the gut microbiome to produce new therapies to benefit patients.

Team Members

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