

## Could Population Changes in Smoking Habits Help Explain the Change in Incidence and Prevalence of Celiac Disease?

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**To the Editor:** Your recent publication “Incidence and prevalence of celiac disease and dermatitis herpetiformis in the UK over two decades: population-based study” by West *et al.* was read with great interest (1). The data convincingly show that the incidence of celiac disease has **AQ2** risen significantly over the 20-year study period. I agree with the conclusion that only a part of this increase is explained by better available serological diagnostic

tests. Indeed there appears to be variability in the incidence in different segments of the population. I wonder whether changing patterns in smoking behavior may be one of the environmental factors that could further help explain the findings. There are data that show a new diagnosis of celiac disease is made significantly less frequently in smokers than in non-smokers (2,3). Furthermore, there also is evidence that smoking may mask the clinical manifestations of celiac disease rather than prevent its occurrence (4). This is a testable hypothesis. Data from the 2011 General Lifestyle Survey, collected by the Office for National Statistics in the UK, show that the prevalence of smoking since 1974 has decreased from 45% to 20% in 2011 (5). Furthermore, the number of adults who are heavy smokers (more than 20 cigarettes a day) also dropped significantly from 26% to 6% in men and from 13% to 4% in women. I wonder if the investigators have access to smoking data in their patient population; if not, it should be assessed in future studies.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest. **AQ1**

### REFERENCES

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