

## **Celiac Leader and Icon Earl Ley in Serious Condition After Cross Country Bike Accident**

*By Brian Hodges*

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*A famous and inspirational Celiac leader, advocate, and icon was involved in a life-threatening biking accident near Pella, Iowa on Tuesday.*

Pella, Iowa -- A famous and inspirational Celiac leader, advocate, and icon was involved in a life-threatening biking accident near Pella, Iowa on Tuesday. (Theodore) Earl Ley, a coordinator for the Seattle Celiacs, raises awareness for the disease by conducting cross country bike rides. He was on the middle stage of his most recent 2000 mile trip from Seattle when he wrecked his bike. He was taken Tuesday to the hospital in Pella (near Des Moines), where they are working on him around the clock. In the accident he broke several ribs, collapsed his lung, broke his pelvic bone, and required a breathing tube. Fortunately for Earl, he has had quality medical attention from the start, and is hoping to recover. Another luck charm; Earl was wearing a protective helmet, which saved his life. The helmet was destroyed in the accident, when Earl was flipped off the right side of his bike, landing upside down near the side of the highway.

Earl often blogs online about celiac awareness as it relates to his biking trips, with several thousand people following his trips each time. Not only do his cross country bike trips raise awareness of the disease, but it shows other Celiacs that even the hardest of activities is still well within their reach.

Jack Hodges, a lifelong friend of Earl Ley, was one of the hundreds of friends and family members tracking Earl's progress, and commented on Earl's positive nature playing a role in his recovery. "Earl is one of those guys who is always looking for the positive aspects of life. I would bet Earl will tell you that the suffering he is going through right now is worth it if he raises more awareness for the disease and helped others think about getting diagnosed. Even in this time of near-tragedy I am sure he hopes the silver lining will appear. Regardless, we pray for a speedy recovery."

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder of the small bowel that occurs in genetically predisposed individuals in all age groups after early infancy. Symptoms may include diarrhea, failure to thrive (in children) and fatigue, but these may be absent and associated symptoms in all other organ systems have been described. It affects approximately 1% of Caucasian populations, though it is significantly underdiagnosed. A growing portion of diagnoses are being made in asymptomatic persons as a result of increasing screening. Celiac disease is caused by an abnormal reaction to gliadin, a gluten protein found in wheat (and similar proteins in barley and rye). Upon exposure to gliadin, the body's immune system cross-reacts with the enzyme tissue transglutaminase, causing an inflammatory reaction that leads to flattening of the lining the small intestine, which interferes with the absorption of nutrients. The only effective treatment is a diet, lifelong in principle, from which gluten is absent.

Earl Ley is a aeronautical enthusiast, triathlete, and cross country biker. He is also a respected deacon and elder at the First Baptist Church of Lake Hills (FBLH), and along with his wife Nell, donates countless hours each year in the community. The Seattle, Celiac, FBLH, and Iowa communities are all hoping for a speedy recovery for Earl. Anyone wanting to wish Earl well, please send words of encouragement to: [earl.ley@comcast.net](mailto:earl.ley@comcast.net).

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