

Gluten Sensitivity: Against the Grain

Many folks have been commenting on the wonderful selection of gluten free products we carry at the Silver City Food Co-op, the store where I work. Gluten free products are a wonderful way to discover new information about your body and the foods you eat without making an overly radical change to your dietary habits that your mind can't handle. If you have any chronic physical ailments that no doctors can cure, you really should give a wheatless diet a try, at least for six months, to see how your body responds.

Do you have a tummy ache that won't stop hurting? Chances are good that you may be allergic to wheat gluten. This allergy is known as celiac disease, and it is far more prevalent than most people realize. 1 in 133 people have gluten intolerance, and of those who have it, over 95% don't even know. Over 3 million Americans of all ages, races, and genders are affected, but only a few thousand realize that they have this problem because the symptoms are so varied or unobservable. It is nearly always misdiagnosed as something else.

Celiac disease attacks the small intestine, where nutrition is absorbed from food. The result is a lack of nutrition, no matter how much one eats or supplements the diet. The results can be problems with the nervous system, problems with internal organs, problems with skin, vision impairment, bone or muscle weakness, problems with digestion, and on and on. Usually it is misdiagnosed as other difficulties such as irritable bowel syndrome, Crohn's Disease, and even osteoporosis. There is an enormous list of diseases that this allergy pretends to be, since it is actually malnutrition. Eventually, celiac disease becomes an autoimmune problem, and gets misdiagnosed as type 1 diabetes or thyroid disease.(b, c, d, e, h)

Gluten intolerance is a different ballgame, but feels awful, too. When a person has gluten intolerance, they suffer similarly to folks who are lactose intolerant, but the problem doesn't turn into an autoimmune disaster. With gluten intolerance, just like lactose intolerance, once the offending food has passed through the body and been absorbed or eliminated it is gone and the person feels better. (h)

Gluten is the sticky stuff in grains, especially wheat, barley, and rye. It is used commercially for baking, providing the elasticity to dough and the ability of the dough to rise. Gluten gives bread the chewy texture. Gluten makes fluffy bread possible, too, because the carbon dioxide gets trapped in the glutens proteins. If you find that MSG (monosodium glutamate) gives you headaches, chances are good that you have at least a gluten intolerance, because the glutamate part of that product is gluten.

A popular use of gluten is meat analogs, the fake meat so popular with vegetarians and people cutting down on cholesterol. Gluten is also found in

the glue on stamps, the capsules around supplements, and in supplement pills to hold the whole thing together. Any label containing the following words has grain gluten: stabilizer, starch, flavoring, emulsifier, hydrolyzed, plant protein. If you read labels (and we all should) you know that's a lot of gluten! It's extremely difficult to avoid and many products claiming to be gluten free still contain them. (a, b, f, i)

Wheat, rye, and barley can all cause difficulties for people with celiac disease. There are two proteins in these, glutenin and gliadin. Gliadin is the culprit. Corn, oats, and rice are okay, because they don't contain the protein fraction gliadin, just the protein fraction glutenin, but naturally, some folks are allergic to those, as well. Oats were considered bad for celiacs for a long time, but it was determined that all of our oats were coming from factories which also processed wheat, contaminating the test supplies, and new evidence says that pure oats are fine. Unfortunately, due to the early contamination, scientific evidence points both ways on oats. (f, g)

There are hospital tests for celiac disease, but they are considered inaccurate by all accounts. These tests require you to continue eating the wheat until the tests are completed, and basically the hospital will try to determine if your small intestine is damaged by the wheat by analyzing the blood. Misdiagnoses abound, and the failure rate on the test is so high as to be nearly useless. Some folks need this test for their peace of mind, however, but they need to realize that the test results can be easily misinterpreted and only a handful of hospitals in the country are set up to perform this biopsy of the small intestine. (d, e, f, g)

To test for gluten intolerance or celiac disease, just stop eating anything except fresh fruit, veggies, and organic meats for a few months (good luck with that), and see if your symptoms disappear. When you slip and eat something with gluten (you will, oh yes, we all do) just notice how you feel after you eat that food. Pay attention to your body and emotional state after you realize you ate that cookie, dinner roll, piece of cake, dietary supplement, restaurant meal, or whatever, and remember, if you have celiac disease, you need to start your several month test over again at that point.

The only sure-fire way to determine if you are allergic to wheat, or almost any food, is to eliminate it from your diet for a while, and see if your body and mind respond in a positive way. It won't hurt you to remove wheat from your diet, because the vitamins you get from wheat are readily available in other more nutritious whole foods.

***Be very careful with 'gluten free' products as they are still highly refined and processed, contain lots of salt and frequently sugar – and do not aid in fat loss due to the processed flours. In fact, many people actually GAIN weight when leaving gluten behind due to INCREASING the eating of refined and processed*

baked goods labeled 'gluten-free'.

Go to your local health food store and get some fresh produce, organic rice, organic potatoes, and locally raised eggs and meat to start your own test to see if you can cure what ails you by eliminating wheat from your diet for a few months. Try eating gluten free. It could be the magic combination you've been seeking to feel, look, and actually be exceptionally healthy!

Leonard Buckingham

- a. <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/gluten>
- b. <http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/celiac/>
- c. <http://www.celiaccentral.org/About-Celiac-Disease/Facts-Figures/35/>
- d. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/celiac-disease/DS00319>
- e. http://www.wrongdiagnosis.com/c/celiac_disease/misdiag.htm
- f. <http://www.celiac.com/articles/8/1/What-is-gluten-What-is-gliadin/Page1.html>
- g. <http://www.gicare.com/diets/Gluten-Free.aspx>
- h. <http://americanceliac.org/celiac-disease>
- i. <http://gfcf-diet.talkaboutcuringautism.org/hidden-sources-of-gluten.htm>