

Gluten

Just the Facts and a
Few Opinions

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“The world has gone crazy with gluten misinformation and paranoia,” I was told by a local doctor. I half agree that there is misinformation-that is, gluten issues are much *worse* and much more common than is even thought now!

Gluten “paranoia” is at a new high. According to some studies nearly a third of all adults want to remove gluten from their diet. What happened? For people who have been alive over forty years or so, it is unlikely you even heard of such a thing as a child. But then again, in the 1950’s and 1960’s infertility clinics were mostly unheard of. Getting pregnant too easily was the problem then. Things have changed.

Gluten is found naturally in wheat, barley and rye. It is a protein part of these grains and gives the food its elasticity. It is often found in other grains such as oats and spelt, not because it occurs in them naturally, but because they are often grown together with gluten grains. One can contaminate the other during this process.

There are four common thoughts I have heard on the gluten issue. One, is that this is just a fad and a creation of the gluten free industry. This is compounded by the fact that most doctors, including doctors who specialize in allergies and digestive issues tend to downplay the gluten question. This one, I can tell you, is a huge mistake. Gluten, as we will discuss is a major player in the health of many, many people.

Next is the idea that this is nothing new, people have always had these problems. I don’t think so. It seems a combination of the next two points discounts this.

Something has happened to wheat and the other grains. Between food processing, holding grains in bins until pricing is good for the market, etc. there are many theories that grains themselves have changed. I have looked into this quite a bit and think there is truth here. That is, if given a piece of wheat from 200 years ago many people would have no reaction. I can’t prove this, but from all I have studied I think this is a reality.

Finally, something has happened to us. We are not as healthy as we used to be and react differently. I think it is a combination of these last two items, food changing and our inability to handle things well that has led to this epidemic.

Celiac Disease

There is a major confusion involving celiac disease and gluten. Celiac disease is a specific disease where the body attacks itself in the small intestine and a portion of the lining of this organ is destroyed. The attack is caused by a severe reaction to eating gluten.

Many people tell me that they don't have celiac disease so they don't have to worry about eating gluten. This is a terrible mistake. Celiac disease only refers to the gluten effect on the small intestines. If gluten creates a problem in any other part of the body, it is not "celiac disease", but it can be equally devastating.

Autoimmune Disease

When a person has a condition where their own immune system attacks gluten, it also attacks its own enzymes. One of these enzymes is called tissue transglutaminase. This enzyme is found throughout the body, including skin, heart, thyroid, bones and nervous system. Conditions arising from this can include skin problems, anxiety, depression, any digestive disturbance, hormonal problems and so on.

What Happened

The simplest way to understand this is through "leaky gut syndrome". Warning: This is another condition that is often scoffed at by traditional medicine. So, if you bring this up to a traditionally trained professional, you may likely be greeted by a smirk and a discounting remark. Unfortunately, this doesn't make the problem any less real.

As with gluten in general, professional journals are filled with studies showing the sad reality of leaky gut syndrome. Here are the basics:

The intestines are permeable, they allow chemicals out, into the blood stream. However, they are supposed to be selective. When they become porous, areas that were supposed to be selective lose their "tight junctions" and molecules seep into the blood stream where they don't belong. Think of it like having multiple

small holes in your digestive tract. Following this, the immune system gets involved and targets these unwanted and misplaced proteins. For many people, this is the beginning of their autoimmune triggered reactions. And in my experience over the last 35 years, gluten is the number 1 culprit.

But I never used to have a problem?

I know, but different stresses can initiate these immune irregularities. Emotional stresses, good or bad (pregnancy or a loss), physical stresses (accidents), other illnesses (heart disease) can all trigger this problem.

So How Do I Know?

How do I know if I have a problem? Well, some people just know. They get sick, bloated, lose sleep, or virtually any other problem after eating something with gluten. Those are the “lucky” people. For others, the reactions may be subtle or delayed and they will eat it without knowing the consequences. They just don’t feel right but aren’t sure why.

There is testing that can be done. Gluten itself has been shown to break down into 19 components. The major blood labs test only 3 or 4 of these as they rely on old research. So many people tell me they have been tested and don’t have a problem. Yes, true they don’t based on the 4 components-what about the other 15 or so, that weren’t tested?

There is a lab which tests all 19, but this test also has limitations. In order to test positive a person has to eat gluten for a minimal specific time prior to the test. They also have to have an immune system strong enough to produce the “antibodies” which are being tested. And also, this is not reliable in young children.

Another alternative, which we now do in this office is a genetic test. This can be done via stool or saliva testing. We usually do it with saliva because we can get a lot more information and it is more cost effective.

If a person shows a positive gene for gluten sensitivity they are recommended to avoid gluten, even if they have no symptoms *at this time*. In this world, we want to avoid wear and tear whenever possible.

Staying Off of Gluten

First, let me say that gluten free products are not necessarily healthy. They are gluten free, but many contain other toxins. But again, the good news, they are gluten free.

As stated gluten is in wheat, barley and rye. Other grains are assumed to be contaminated unless they specifically state they have been grown and processed in a gluten free field/facility. It is also in many other products. Here is a partial list: soy sauce, food starch, food emulsifiers, food stabilizers, artificial food coloring, malt extract, flavor, syrup, dextrin, and modified food starch. Remember, this is a partial list-and it is also found in some skin care products.

Where to look for more information

The following sites may give useful information:

1. Glutenfreewatchdog.com—offers up to date testing of many gluten free products.
2. Gluten.org-offers education and recipes and some gluten free restaurants
3. Glutenfreedrugs.com-offers a list of medications with hidden gluten
4. Glutenfreegirl.com-offers cooking help
5. Nourishingmeals.com-offers help with meals
6. Recipeforahealthylife.com-a local health coach who can meet with you individually

Also, let me know if you want someone who specializes in kosher cooking concerns.

Sensitive or Intolerant?

Technically food sensitivities and intolerances are not the same. An intolerance means you lack an enzyme to digest specific nutrients or you have too many of these nutrients to be completely digested-or the nutrient can't be digested properly. Intolerances are technically related to digestion.

Sensitivities are individual reactions that include primary immune responses.

Whatever you have, you need to take complete action. Let me know and we can set up a time to meet and discuss. Remember, for many it is impossible to know if you are having the problem without proper testing. And correction means more than staying off of gluten. If your problem is caused mostly by leaky gut syndrome that needs to be corrected as well. If you have developed neurological symptoms as a result, these need to be corrected.

Think of it like this—gluten has caused inflammation in your body. This inflammation, like a fire has likely compromised or destroyed a degree of your functioning. Putting out the fire is essential, but it is unlikely that it will rebuild what has been torn down.

One last thought—some people who go off gluten don't get the results they want. Unfortunately, for some gluten is only one of their food problems. Again, we can discuss this as it varies from person to person.

The following pages are from PRACTICAL GASTROENTEROLOGY