

Appetite for Knowledge



MOST PEOPLE SHOULDN'T EAT GLUTEN-FREE

Many Americans have cut back on the amount of gluten in their diets or are avoiding it altogether.

WHAT IS GLUTEN?

Gluten is a protein found in many grains, including wheat, rye, and barley. It's found in most breads, cereals, pastas, and many processed foods.

CELIAC DISEASE

For people with celiac disease, a life-threatening autoimmune disorder that destroys the gastrointestinal tract, going gluten-free is critical to avoid damage to the small intestine and to live a healthy life. About 1 percent of the population has been diagnosed with celiac disease.

Celiac disease cannot be self-diagnosed, and a patient must be eating gluten for the disorder to be identified. If you are concerned that you may have celiac disease, have your doctor perform an intestinal biopsy. In healthy people, the inside of the small intestine is lined with finger-like projections called villi that help the body absorb nutrients. In people with celiac disease, gluten irritates the lining of the small intestine and also causes the immune system to attack the villi. Over time, the villi can be

damaged or destroyed. This often means that the body can no longer absorb enough nutrients from food. Nutrients pass through the digestive tract and are excreted with the body's waste, and the person can suffer malnutrition.

WHEAT ALLERGIES

Other people who may need to cut back on gluten are individuals who have a wheat allergy, they need to avoid wheat, but not all grains, and people with gluten sensitivity, who may feel better when they eat less gluten.



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REPLACING GLUTEN

If you must eliminate wheat from the diet, make sure to replace it with a healthy, naturally gluten-free grain, such as quinoa or buckwheat. You should also balance the diet with lots of fruits and vegetables. Lean meat and low-fat dairy products are equally important for a gluten-free diet.

MOST PEOPLE ARE FINE WITH GLUTEN

For most other people, a gluten-free diet will not provide a benefit because whole grains, which contain gluten, are a good source of fiber, vitamins, and minerals. A whole grain contains all three parts of a grain: the bran, germ, and endosperm, in contrast to a refined grain which only contains the endosperm. The nutritional riches are mostly found in the bran and the germ. Gluten-free products are often made with refined grains, and are lacking in critical nutrients such as fiber, iron, zinc, folate, niacin, thiamine, riboflavin, calcium, vitamin B12, and phosphorus.

Many people on gluten-free diets don't have a medically needed dietary restriction and eat gluten-free as a fad diet. People who go gluten-free may feel better because, to avoid the protein, they end up cutting out refined carb- and sugar-laden snacks and desserts, thus losing weight. They mistakenly attribute that to their gluten-free decision. If gluten-containing products are replaced with highly processed gluten-free foods like pastries, energy bars, etc., you will not lose weight, and you may, in fact, gain weight, as many gluten-free foods are higher in calories than their gluten-containing replacements.

REINTRODUCING GLUTEN

Personally, I do not believe there is a benefit to eating gluten-free if you don't have a gluten intolerance. Are you ready to reunite with gluten? Here is how experts say to do it as healthfully and comfortably as possible:

1. KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT

Any major diet change is going to take some time for your body to adjust. Reintroducing gluten is no exception. When you start including those foods you have eliminated, you are going to have some temporary gas, abdominal pain, or bloating.

2. ADD GLUTEN SLOWLY

To ease your body and mind into a new eating pattern, small changes win. Begin with just one gluten-containing food a day and eventually increasing your intake to one at each meal. Since increasing your intake of grains means eating more fiber, you'll want to make sure you're upping your water intake too.

3. READ LABELS

Not all gluten-containing foods are created equal so it's a good idea to read labels when you're re-entering the bread section.

Pass it on: If you don't have celiac disease, a wheat allergy, or a gluten sensitivity, you're unlikely to benefit from a gluten-free diet. Aside from that, going gluten free isn't easy!

Sources

- Beyond Celiac, beyondceliac.org
- Live Science, livescience.com
- Mayo Clinic, mayoclinic.org



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