

Living the
**Gluten-Free
Lifestyle**



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Going Gluten-free: A New Trend or a Smart Choice?

Not long ago, the term "gluten-free" was thought to only be for those who suffered serious health issues in regard to gluten intolerances. Today, however, many individuals are choosing to live a gluten-free life.

There are many reasons people will opt for a gluten-free diet. Some are more obvious than others and include:

- Celiac disease
- Gluten intolerance
- Wheat allergies
- Inflammatory processes
- Personal choice



Celiac Disease

When particles of gluten bond with intestinal proteins and generate a hypersensitive overreaction from white blood cells, celiac disease can develop. The small intestine plays an integral role in this process as they are designed to absorb nutrients. With Celiac Disease, however, the small intestines cannot do their job properly because the body's white blood cells incorrectly identify the gluten bond particles as an enemy and therefore set out to destroy the lining of the small intestine.

Some of the symptoms of celiac disease are associated with other diseases though so blood tests are typically necessary to properly diagnose the problem. Some of those symptoms you may experience with Celiac Disease are as follows:

- Abdominal pain
- Persistent diarrhea
- Bloating
- Constipation
- Vomiting
- Fatigue
- Weight loss

Gluten Intolerance

Word of mouth is a very powerful tool. Many individuals have opted to adopt a gluten-free lifestyle because someone that they know has touted the benefits from doing so. For most individuals, there are no real cut and dry answers as to whether he or she may have intolerance to gluten. Blood work along with an endoscopic biopsy of the small intestine will determine if the patient has celiac disease, however, there is not much in the way scientifically to report whether a person has gluten intolerance.

Many individuals claim to simply feel better when not eating products that contain gluten. These people state that living a gluten-free lifestyle simply leaves them feeling more energized, less bloated, and with clearer thinking capacities.

Wheat Allergies

Wheat allergies, however, are another story. An allergy, unlike intolerance, caused by gluten is a serious subject. When an antibody to wheat is produced, also known as an IgE, many allergic reactions will occur:

- Hives
- Redness
- Swelling
- Itchy eyes, nose, throat
- Cramping
- Vomiting and diarrhea
- And in worse case scenarios, anaphylaxis

Anaphylaxis can cause many serious side effects such as:

- trouble swallowing
- difficulty breathing



- chest pain
- tightening of the throat
- an accelerated heart beat

Thankfully, these are the extreme cases.

Inflammatory Process

While there is no concrete evidence either medically or scientifically that going gluten-free is necessary for inflammation to decrease, many individuals who stick to a gluten-free diet believe that it does help.

Some individuals tout the benefits of being gluten-free as having more energy and feeling less bloated; but research does not support this as of yet.

Personal Choice

For those with true celiac disease, it must be hard to comprehend why anyone who did not have to would go on a gluten-free diet. Gluten-free products are extremely costly and definitely do taste differently.

Having said that, individuals become gluten-free for many reasons:

1. According to celebrities in the media, it is all the rage right now. Some individuals want to be trendy and follow those trends regardless of the reasoning.
2. Other consumers of gluten-free products say that they feel differently when eating a strictly gluten-free diet. Benefits such as more energy, less bloating, better memory are just a few of the claims made by individuals for going gluten-free.
3. Losing weight is a big motivator. Some individuals have pronounced the most positive effect of going gluten-free is the ability to lose weight and keep it off.
4. Avoiding things such as gas, bloating, cramping, and fatigue are a big bonus, as well.
5. Gaining more mental clarity is something that most everyone both male and female would appreciate obtaining.

For many consumers, eating a diet without gluten simply makes them feel better, whether or not they are reaping any scientifically proven benefits and rewards

To avoid feeling the dreaded bloating often associated with eating gluten-filled foods, people may choose to go gluten-free. Bloat is something everyone experiences, some more than others. Women tend to get hit doubly during their menstrual cycle. So if there is even a slim chance to alleviate some of the gluten related bloating, many will be happy to give a gluten-free diet a try.

The Benefits of a Gluten-free Diet

If you are a celiac sufferer, the benefits of going gluten-free are obvious. You get to alleviate some serious side effects to gluten including saving the lining of your small intestine from being under constant attack. Gas, bloating, vomiting, or diarrhea is side effects of gluten intolerance, as well.

If you are not a celiac sufferer, but instead are seeking the benefits of going gluten-free for the simple reason that it is the talk of town, you can still find many benefits from this change in diet. They include, but are not limited to:

1. **Mental clarity may be a benefit.** After removing gluten from their diets, many individuals report having more mental clarity. These individuals say that after months or years of “being in a fog” that the fog dissipates for them after being on a gluten-free diet. They also suggest that their memory loss and forgetfulness seem improves.
2. **Fatigue seems to decrease.** Consumers of a gluten-free diet may find that his or her issues with sleep will improve once they remove gluten from their dietary intake. A better night’s sleep and feeling less drowsy during the day may be good enough reasons for the sleep deprived to give the gluten-free lifestyle a try.
3. **Maintaining weight is a desired goal.** Losing weight and maintaining the weight loss is a desired goal for millions of people. Many people report that they were finally able to lose weight and keep it off after they changed their diet to be gluten-free.
4. **Gluten could be life threatening.** While mental clarity, fatigue and weight loss are all good reasons to give this diet a try, if you have celiac disease, going gluten-free can save your life.



For celiac suffers, even a tiny amount may have an adverse effect on the body. It can cause iron deficiency and anemia as well as Osteoporosis. Gluten can also set off a very serious reaction for some folks, including anaphylactic shock which can be fatal.

While many other individuals praise the fact that they are on gluten-free diets and tout benefits such as an overall feeling of well-being, energy increase, and alertness, none of these attributes have been conclusive in persons with only a small sensitivity to gluten.

For all of the good that a gluten-free diet does, it isn't without its faults.

The Downfalls of a Gluten-free Lifestyle

Whole grains and wheat products have been a staple for the human diet for ages, and with good reason. By opting for a gluten-free lifestyle you might be unnecessarily eliminating vital nutrients your body needs to stay healthy. Four such nutrients include:

Niacin – Niacin helps to keep your skin, hair and eyes healthy. It assists with maintaining a healthy nervous and digestive system. Niacin also helps convert carbohydrate into energy which is important if part of your goal for a gluten-free diet is to lose weight.



Iron - Iron has so many important jobs in our body. It carries oxygen to cells and carbon dioxide from them. It helps produce energy and hormones. Iron even plays a role in fighting against infections.

Vitamin B – Vitamin B has many parts and each part provides its own set of benefits. Generally speaking vitamin B is instrumental in maintaining a healthy immune & nervous system.

Zinc – Zinc may not be something you think about often, but its job is as important as any other nutrient. Zinc assists our immune system with responding to threats. It also plays a role in brain function and reproduction.

If you choose to seek out a gluten-free diet, you should consult with your primary care doctor before taking on this new lifestyle. In addition, you should be prepared to take a daily supplement to make up for any lost nutrients.

Nutrients may not be the only thing lacking in a gluten-free diet. Many people complain about the lack of variety available and taste in gluten-free foods. Gluten-free products definitely have a distinct taste and once you have eaten a certain variety of pasta for several years, you may never get used to the gluten-free kind.

Cost is another downside to this diet. Gluten-free products are very costly. Although you may be able to find gluten-free products on the shelves of supermarkets, they will still typically be expensive, especially while gluten-free continues to be the 'in fad' in the eyes of consumers.

Be prepared to become a label reading guru if you choose to go gluten-free. Gluten is found in many unsuspecting foods such as spaghetti sauce, soy sauce, and in some packaged products, as well. You will need to extremely wary of labels and plan to spend extra time shopping, at least in the beginning stages, if you are going totally gluten-free.

Cooking at home is less expensive than purchasing prepared products; however, this can be time consuming and cumbersome. You can certainly buy gluten-free pancake mixes, muffin mixes, cake mixes, and bread mixes, but be prepared for a little bit of mess and some extra time involved in preparing your own gluten-free menus, especially if you start from scratch.

Dining out, eating at another person's home and vacationing can all be extremely difficult while trying to maintain the gluten-free lifestyle. You will need to make certain that your wait staff, hotel staff, and hosts are all aware of your lifestyle choices. If they won't indulge you, you may have to skip the event or prepare your own meal ahead of time and take it with you.

Preparing Your Own Gluten-free Foods

You do not necessarily have to shop in a specialty store that only sells gluten-free products. Many gluten-free foods today can be found in supermarket aisles and the frozen section of many health food stores. Items such as pancake mix, muffin mix, bread mix, cereals, desserts, snacks and even frozen breakfast, lunch and dinner meals can easily be picked up at most supermarkets and health stores.

If you're planning on traveling for an extended time, be sure to visit the gluten-free section of your local supermarket and stock up on snacks. This will ensure you are prepared any delays at the airport, in traffic or in the event that where you are traveling to does not have a gluten-free section within the local stores. If you are headed out for a day trip, consider packing a lunch in a cooler so you can have a ready-made meal when you want.



Preparing gluten-free meals really starts with understanding your grains and starches. You should read up on which grains and starches you can and cannot have as well as what you can use as a substitute. While you're reading, make a list of items you want to look for during your next shopping trip. Keep this list handy so you can take it with you and make notes if you find a brand you particularly like.

Always try small packages of mixes before buying a larger portion. You will find that some gluten-free flours make great muffins but not so great pancakes. Others might do well with biscuits but fall flat with a cake. So test out several to find which brands you like best for each food you make.

If you are planning to be 100% gluten-free, you should be aware of cross-contamination. Always store your gluten-free products separate from everything else. Before using any utensil, make sure it is free of gluten residue. If you can afford it, purchase a new toaster and other appliances that you can use strictly for your gluten meals.

Preparing your own gluten-free products from scratch is similar to batch cooking as you would with normal meals. You can prepare gluten-free pancakes and freeze the batter in separate, smaller containers for the future. Baking breads and muffins in batch form is also a great idea for your workweek. In addition, then there is always the option of preparing gluten-free wraps and filling them with ham and eggs or potatoes and vegetables for a yummy quick breakfast or lunch.

Another awesome idea is to make a gluten-free quiche for dinner and combine it with a salad. This will fill you up, give you vital vegetables such as broccoli and spinach, and keep you gluten-free and satisfied. Many individuals find that freezing individual slices of quiche make for a great breakfast starter or even lunch.

Some Notes about Gluten-free Baking

Be prepared. It is very important to be prepared when undertaking gluten-free baking. It is an art that needs to be learned and learned by the old adage of if you do not succeed at first, try, try, and then try again.

Be patient. Baking gluten-free takes some time and some practice. More than likely your first experience with gluten-free baking will not result in something that is just waiting to be photographed and placed in a magazine. It is a trial and error type of endeavor.



Reap the rewards. Once you have begun the process of trying gluten-free baking, you will notice that you will learn many nuances of gluten-free baking. You will find what works for you, in what amount, and how many ingredients. Stick with it and you will be pleasantly surprised that it will not only taste good to bake gluten-free, but it will feel good, as well.

You can use several different flour bases for your gluten-free baking:

- White rice flour
- Brown rice flour
- Coconut flour
- Almond flour

While the white rice and brown rice flour are a bit more traditional, the coconut and almond flours will add more sweetness and flavor to your base recipe.

Sweet rice flour may have a more starch-oriented base and can add a bit more moisture to your baking.

Buckwheat or quinoa flour will have a thicker and heavier component for your baking base.

As far as starches are concerned, potato starch and cornstarch are good choices for gluten-free baking.

If you are new to gluten-free baking, you will probably have to get used to baking with the additive known as xanthan gum. This is an added ingredient which will increase the thickness of your baking and have it stick together better. You will note as you first set out that baking gluten-free has the tendency to make your wares fall apart. The addition of xanthan gum, used sparingly, seems to alleviate this problem.

The nice thing, however, about gluten-free baking is that you can whip up a big batch of flour and dry ingredients and store it for later use. Adding things like yogurt, nuts (of course if no one is allergic), bananas, and raisins will all make for delicious tasty baked gluten-free goods.

Tips for Eating out Gluten-free

It is much easier to eat out if you are dining out near or close to home. You can always ask a friend or neighbor for restaurant recommendations of gluten-free establishments. Looking online at a menu before you go is easy, as well. Moreover, once you have gotten accustomed to a particular eatery, you can always return if you are satisfied.



However, eating gluten-free when you are traveling may provide a bit of a challenge. You can do several things however, before traveling on a trip if you are eating gluten-free.

1. Contact the hotel where you are staying. Contacting the hotel where you are staying is one of the best ways to gather information about potential gluten-free restaurants and eateries nearby. If the hotel is not familiar with any establishments, chances are more than likely that they will gather that information for you.
2. Do a computer search for locations nearby where you will be staying for gluten-free restaurants and eateries. Sometimes there will be a gluten-free store where you can purchase muffins and lunch items. If your hotel offers a mini fridge or microwave, you may want to pay a few extra dollars for these amenities so that you can purchase some gluten-free foods and heat them up or refrigerate them.
3. Call the restaurants and find out if they are truly 100 percent gluten-free. Restaurant owners and managers are always willing to go above and beyond for customers with special needs.

Doing it On Your Own

Once you have gathered your information and tried buying gluten-free products from a specialty store and then from a supermarket and even trying to make it on your own, it may now be time for you to venture out on your own.

After all that experimenting, you are apt to be hungry and ready to try the gluten-free lifestyle on your own.

A perfect gluten-free day filled with gluten-free meals that are scrumptious and satisfying may look like this:



Breakfast

Any kind of bread made with gluten-free products would be an excellent starter for breakfast. Bread can have as many added ingredients as you choose. For example, banana bread, banana bread with almonds, cinnamon raisin bread, yogurt and berry gluten-free muffins. Gluten-free pancakes are a great way to start your morning, as they will fill you up for the entire morning. Adding blueberries to the mix or just on top is healthy and sweet for you, as well.

Of course, gluten-free does not necessarily mean only bread and muffin products for breakfast. A perfect example of a gluten-free breakfast would be any type of omelet, as long as there is no dairy allergy. An omelet made out of onions, eggs, and a little added green pepper will keep you full and satisfied all morning. Not to mention, you will be starting your day out with vegetables to boot.

A protein shake with banana and all natural peanut butter (again if there is no peanut allergy) will keep your stomach feeling full so that you do not reach for that whole-wheat bagel, after all.

A yogurt parfait is an excellent choice, as well. A layer of nonfat yogurt, then a layer of berries and another layer of yogurt topped with some crushed walnuts is a great choice for any breakfast starter.



Quinoa is another great way to start your morning routine. It may take a practice trial run to perfect the art of making quinoa; however, once you have learned how to properly cook it, it will be an excellent choice for breakfast and many other options, as well.

Quinoa with added apple slices, strawberries, or blueberries is a superb choice for gluten-free breakfasts.

Gluten-free Snacks

If you have foregone the gluten-free muffin for breakfast and opted, for example, to have the protein shake, then reaching for a gluten-free blueberry muffin will fill you up and allow you to make it through until your late lunch.



If you shop in the gluten-free specialty stores or even in the gluten-free section of your supermarket, you will not be at a loss for gluten-free snacks. Gluten-free snacks come in many varieties such as tortilla chips and crackers.

Dipping those into some all natural gluten-free hummus or gluten-free salsa is a perfect snack. Salsa and hummus have protein and fiber, as well as all the benefits that tomatoes and green peppers have to offer.

Of course, you can always reach for an apple, banana, or grapefruit. Hard-boiled eggs are great snacks, as well as handfuls of nuts, and seeds. Of course, with all foods, you have to do your homework and check for cross-contamination of foods, especially if you are concerned with celiac disease.

A gluten-free tortilla wrap with anything gluten-free such as beans is a filling and tasty snack, as well.

Lunch Time

Many of the gluten-free items that you could eat for breakfast are great choices for lunch also. If you did not have pancakes for breakfast, then gluten-free pancakes for lunch with fruit atop is a wise choice indeed.



A lunchtime gluten-free tortilla filled with broiled chicken and vegetables is healthy tasty and filling all rolled into one.

A gluten-free quiche with broccoli and cheddar is so tasty and delicious you will be looking to eat it for breakfast, lunch, and maybe even for dinner.

Quinoa with some added grated cheese and olive oil is also another great lunch option. You will be surprised at how full you will be after eating a delicious bowl of quinoa cooked just the way you like it.

If you are seeking to pop something quickly into the microwave, specialty stores and markets have prepackaged gluten-free meals – everything from mac and cheese to lasagna. Although this is a more expensive option, it is good for a treat once in a while.

Yummy Gluten-free Dinner Meals

Gluten-free dinner meals are not as complicated as you may think. If you purchase your chicken and fish in a gluten-free market, you are halfway there. Adding your own vegetable recipes make for a complete meal.

Chicken and salmon paired with grilled zucchini and eggplant are delicious and healthy meals that will serve you well.

Any type of gluten-free pasta such as corn pasta will be a great gluten-free dinner meal since pasta – even gluten-free- is so versatile. You can make a cold pasta salad with tomatoes, strings, olives, and celery. Another great idea is to top your gluten-free spaghetti with your own homemade tomato sauce. Add a side salad and you are good to go.



For quiche lovers, a gluten-free quiche with mushrooms, tomatoes, zucchini, and cheese with a side salad will fill you up and have you smiling until bedtime.

Gluten-free tortilla wraps make an excellent starter choice for whatever you like to fill them up with such as grilled chicken and vegetables or gluten-free rice and beans.

One of the most important things to remember for gluten-free meals to keep them diversified is to learn how to make your own marinades and lots of them. Different types of rubs and marinades will find you with variety for your chicken, pork chops, and ribs.

Conclusion

Therefore, whether or not you have celiac disease or just trying out a gluten-free lifestyle, having as much information as possible before you begin is a wise choice indeed. As you can see, gluten-free does not have to be complicated. It is just a matter of trial and error and adjusting to your new gluten-free lifestyle.

Once you have gathered your information and experimented a little, you will be surprised at how easy it is to incorporate gluten-free into your everyday life.

