

On Nutrition: by Helayne Waldman, Ed.D., N.E.

Considerations for Celiacs

America, it seems, runs not only on foreign oil, but on wheat. Look at the labels of most every product found on a supermarket shelf, and you'll find wheat or other glutinous grains on the list of ingredients. Gluten itself is a protein found in all forms of wheat (including durum, semolina, and spelt), rye, barley and related grain hybrids such as triticale and kamut. These days, avoiding glutinous grains is not as difficult as it was only a decade or two ago. Quinoa, sorghum, buckwheat, amaranth, and millet, for example, are delicious alternatives to wheat, and rice of course, is a longtime stand in.*

The more vexing problem is that gluten can be found hiding in many unsuspecting foods such as licorice, soy sauce, malt vinegar, flavorings and processed foods, cold cuts, prepared stocks and soups – even some vinegars and alcohols. Gluten is also used as a binder in pharmaceutical products and nutritional supplements, and may also turn up in “modified food starch”, caramel coloring, hydrolyzed plant or vegetable protein.

If you have been diagnosed with celiac disease, this presents a challenging dilemma.

In a celiac patient, the body develops an autoimmune response to the lining of the small intestine. This response is activated by gluten, and the more glutinous the grain, the more aggressive the activation. Though the cause of celiac disease is not entirely clear, there appears to be a genetic tendency toward it in certain populations (Northern and Central



European, in particular). Some experts suggest that the early introduction of cow's milk can contribute to the development of the disease as well.

The good news for celiacs is that with the elimination of gluten from the diet, symptoms improve quickly and dramatically.

Getting Started

While volumes have been written about conforming to a non-glutinous diet, here are a few quick ideas to get you started on what can initially feel like an insurmountable task.

- 1. Shop on the perimeter.** The perimeter of the supermarket, that is. This is the area that houses fruits, vegetables, dairy, eggs, unprocessed meats and fish – the foods that won't get you into trouble. While you're moving your cart away from the center area (a majority of which is populated by processed foods) consider this: by eating more whole foods and fewer processed foods, you are not only helping your celiac disease, you are nourishing your entire body with the food nature intended for you to eat. You may well start to notice that by adding whole, nutrient-rich foods to your everyday diet,
- 2. Become a label reader.** Start reading the labels of all foods before spending a cent on them. Make this a habit for life. Stay away from anything that includes the words stabilizer, starch, emulsifier, flavoring or hydrolyzed plant protein. If you're not certain what a word on the label means, put the product back on the shelf and go back to the perimeter!
- 3. Switch to whole grains only.** As long as you're coming off wheat and other grains, why not make the most of the grains you can eat? Avoiding the “whites” will keep you out of dangerous territory, because refined grains, whether they're wheat, rice or something else, are stripped of all nutritional value. Use your change of diet as an opportunity to derive new benefit from the vitamins, minerals and fiber that abound in brown rice, sorghum and buckwheat. Your local health food store is your best source of whole grains, while a reputable online distributor such as Tropical Traditions is an excellent source of high-quality, organic, gluten free products that can be ordered online (http://www.tropicaltraditions.com/organic_gluten_free.htm).
- 4. Consider taking a full spectrum digestive enzyme with each meal.** This will help you more efficiently digest not only carbohydrates, but fats and proteins as well. In fact, several of my clients have reported that vague symptoms of indigestion and bloating have all but disappeared with the addition of

seemingly unrelated complaints may start to resolve as well.

digestive enzymes to the meal. As an additional experiment, you may want to add the enzyme papain to the beginning of your meals. According to Dr. Michael Murray, this natural protein digesting enzyme found in the papaya fruit has been shown to be able to digest wheat gluten and render it harmless in some experimental celiac disease subjects. "Taking a papain supplement (500-1,000 milligrams) with meals may allow some individuals to tolerate small amounts of gluten," notes Murray. Worth a try, perhaps?

- 5. Work with an experienced dietician or nutritionist in setting up your new eating plan.** A major overhaul of your diet is no small feat. You'll not

only need all of the professional advice you can get, but the emotional and practical support as well. Organizations such as Turning the Tables in Oakland will even come to your home to help you with exactly this type of "nutritional makeover." (www.turning-the-tables.com) Making healthy changes that you can stick with will pay big dividends for the long haul, and is well worth the upfront investment.

However you decide to approach your new challenges, remember that there are millions of others out there facing the same ones. To find them and get started sharing information and successes, check out www.gluten.net or

www.celiac.org. Best of luck on your journey!

*A few patients are sensitive to the "prolamines" in buckwheat and millet, which are similar in structure to the offending gluten protein in wheat. In addition, some celiacs tolerate oat with no difficulty whatever, while others experience discomfort. Individual experimentation is key!

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