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**Gluten is not harmful to healthy people.**



**Gluten does not cause weight gain.**

## Going Gluten-free?

BY WINSTON J. CRAIG

**T**o be gluten-free is in vogue. About two to three percent of Americans claim to avoid gluten. Many consumers view a gluten-free diet as healthier, and claim it helps them feel better. Others believe avoiding gluten can help them lose weight.

While bread is considered to be the “staff of life,” all breads containing wheat, rye or barley contain gluten. And wheat can lurk in a lot of unlikely places, such as soups, gravies and soy sauce. Gluten also shows up in many whole grain foods related to wheat, including bulgar, kamut, spelt and triticale.

For people with Celiac disease, a gluten-free diet is essential to avoid adverse health effects. Yet, most of the people who reach for gluten-free products don't have gluten intolerance.

For them, a gluten-free diet may not be the best since gluten-free products tend to be low in a wide range of important nutrients, including B vitamins, calcium, iron, zinc, magnesium and fiber. The use of whole grain foods (that contain gluten) also is associated with the lowered risk of diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers.

Experts estimate that about 3 million Americans, from all ethnic groups, have Celiac disease. With this condition, there is an abnormal immune response to gluten, and the villi are attacked. The lining of the small intestine becomes inflamed and damaged, and normal absorption of food is blocked.

Symptoms of Celiac disease include diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, bloating, anemia, severe skin rash, muscular disturbances, headaches and fatigue. Young children can experience failure to thrive. But Celiac disease often has few or no symptoms, and only about five to ten percent of cases have been diagnosed. Sometimes a stressor, such as surgery, an infection or a strong emotional event, can

exacerbate gluten intolerance so that the symptoms become noticeable.

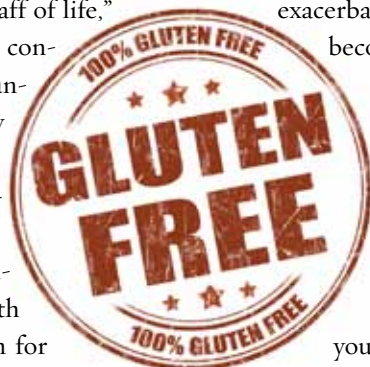
How can you know if you have Celiac disease? First, a blood test detects antibodies related to an abnormal immune response. Second, if the blood test is positive, a biopsy is performed to confirm an inflammation in the lining of the small intestines.

Completely eliminating gluten means you have to give up most breads, crackers,

breakfast cereals, conventional pastas, pastry goods and a wide range of processed foods. For a product to be labeled “gluten-free,” it must not contain more than 20 parts per million of gluten. Gluten-free, whole-grain choices include brown rice, buckwheat and corn as well as amaranth, millet and quinoa.

Low-gluten diets may improve gastrointestinal symptoms. This may be due to a reduction in poorly-absorbed simple sugars (such as fructans and galactans and sugar alcohols), often associated with foods containing gluten. Gut symptoms can disappear once these sugars are reduced.

There is no evidence that a gluten-free diet helps with weight loss. On the other hand, whole wheat products that are high in fiber are useful for hunger control and weight management. People who go gluten-free may lose weight because they switch to eating more fruit and vegetables, and eat less calories. Most gluten-free alternatives are significantly more expensive, and this is an incentive to eat less.



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