Gluten Sensitivity – Fact or Fiction?

Gluten, found in many staple foods, is a substance that gives elasticity to dough. Until recently, a strict gluten-free diet was only of interest to people with celiac disease, an autoimmune disease in which proteins from grains (such as wheat, rye and barley) damage the small intestine. However, more people are now finding that they feel better on a gluten-free diet. So, is this a psychological "placebo effect", or do people actually benefit physically from a gluten-free diet?

Research has now confirmed that gluten sensitivity does exist. Some experts say that gluten sensitivity is much more common than celiac disease. In celiac disease, the intestine is damaged, but in gluten sensitivity, it is not. Symptoms for both can be similar (including stomach aches and pain, bloating, constipation, diarrhoea, IBS) so it is important to get tested. Symptoms of gluten sensitivity can affect any organ or tissue in your body, and can include muscular and joint pain, fatigue, anaemia, and tingling in hands and feet.

Why are more people now reacting to gluten when we have been eating grains for 10,000 years? First of all, to make those lovely fluffy white breads, modern grain has been cultivated so that it contains much more gluten than it did in the past. Secondly, our diets have changed significantly in the past few decades. We now eat gluten in most meals, unlike in the past. Wheat flour is used in a vast range of modern, mass-produced "ready-made" meals and sauces. (Even your mustard can have it). So we are consuming far greater quantities of gluten, more frequently, than our ancestors.

When our bodies digest gluten, the lining of the intestine is temporarily damaged. This makes it permeable to gluten proteins (hence 'leaky gut'), which is the mechanism behind

both gluten sensitivity and celiac disease. For most people this inflammation is healed relatively quickly after eating but for some it takes much longer. Other aggravating factors include modern additions from the food chain, including pesticides and GMO foods, which have been linked to ‘leaky gut’. To ensure there are no pesticide residues or genetically modified substances, which may affect your gut health, choose organic food.

If you feel that you suffer from symptoms that may be caused by gluten, get tested for celiac disease. Then you can try going gluten free for a minimum of 4 weeks, then reintroduce gluten to see the difference in how you feel. Take good care of your general gut health, as the gut is the basis for your overall health. Feed the good bacteria in your intestine by eating plenty of organic vegetables and fruit every day. Also, introduce fermented foods, such as sauerkraut and probiotic yogurts. Avoid damaging your intestinal lining with unnecessary antibiotics, drugs or alcohol.

Author: Marika Walker graduated in Nutritional Therapy from CNM (College of Naturopathic Medicine) the UK’s largest training provider in natural therapies.

Recommended Reading:

- *Gluten, Candida, Leaky Gut Syndrome, and Autoimmune Diseases*
- *Foods To Avoid With Gluten Intolerance or Celiac Disease*
- *Is Wheat Poison? What’s Behind the Rise of Celiac Disease and Gluten Intolerance*
- *Understand Hypothyroidism – Prevention and Natural Remedies*
- *Cheap and Easy Detox Diet Plan*