Is Millet Gluten Free, Healthy, and Environmentally Sustainable?

Millet is not sexy. A staple grain in India and the semi-arid regions of Africa, Americans are more likely to associate it with bird seed than delicious dinners. Millet refers to a family of small-seeded grasses. The most commonly available one in the U.S. is called Proso millet, and it resembles a small yellow bead. Other kinds of millet include Pearl millet (popularly grown in India), Foxtail or German millet, Finger millet, and fonio. The grain is also used to feed livestock and brew alcoholic beverages.

Millet doesn't have a very distinctive flavor and can be difficult to find in your average grocery store. There are also several articles warning you not to consume millet. So why bother with millet? A healthy diet has variety, and millet has something to offer the environmentally friendly eater, the gluten-free eater, and the eater on a budget. Let's dive in!

Good Millet

Sustainable food is a big deal these days, as climates are more unstable than ever before. A crop like millet plays into what will potentially be the new growing sweet spot – tolerant of drought, high temperatures, and poor soil. Millet also grows quite quickly.

Millet popularity is on the rise in the U.S., in large part due to the demand for gluten-free grains from health-conscious eaters and people with celiacs. In addition to being gluten-free, millet is especially mineral heavy. Like other ancient grains (quinoa, amaranth, and spelt), it contains high levels of magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, zinc, calcium, and iron.

It’s also a great source of amino acids, protein, antioxidants, and fiber.

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With its many nutrients, millet has been shown to support the cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and respiratory systems. It has the potential to protect against diabetes and cancer. Millet can also slow the development of cataracts. Scientists have been slow to research millet, so it’s possible that there are even more reasons to add millet to your diet.

Bad Millet

At this point millet probably sounds like a dream come true. The ancient grain-ness of quinoa. The versatility of rice. All without the environmental difficulties, sustainability issues, and arsenic. There has to be a catch…and there is.

Millet (especially cooked millet) contains goitrogens, substances interfere with iodine uptake in the thyroid. This interference triggers the pituitary gland, releasing thyroid stimulating hormones, prompting thyroid tissue growth, and ultimately resulting in a goiter. Goiters are still prevalent in regions with a history of regular millet consumption like India, China, and Central Africa.

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This thyroid issue is a more extreme version of the issues people have with eating too much kale and other cruciferous vegetables. Leaky gut seems to be a possible cause or at least exacerbates the symptoms. For someone with these issues or other thyroid conditions, millet may not be the best gluten-free grain option to eat regularly. It can be argued that millet is much more effective as a way to increase the diversity of your diet rather than as a pantry staple.

Related: *Gluten, Candida, Leaky Gut Syndrome, and Autoimmune Diseases*

Available Millet

So you want to give millet a try. Good news… it's cheap! Pre-prepared millet most often takes the form of bread, but the real savings are in purchasing millet in bulk and preparing it yourself. Your best bets for finding millet are the bulk/bean and grain sections at the grocery store or online. Even though whole millet with the hull retains more nutrition, the majority of the millet for sale is already hulled.

Despite the loss of nutrients, hulled millet is much easier to cook, and roasting it seems to retain the most protein overall. It makes an easy substitute for rice or quinoa in salads, Buddha bowls, wraps, stuffed peppers, soups and anything else you would use a small grain for.

Diversity is Worth It

Millet has some great things to recommend it from both a health and sustainability perspective. It's also hard on the thyroid, an organ already experiencing a range of difficulties due to the modern diet and environment. When those two factors cancel each other out, it's important to remember one thing – everything starts in the gut. A more varied diet leads to a greater variety of gut microbes which in turn improves the overall health of the body. Adding in a side of millet every couple of weeks allows you to increase your culinary repertoire while also inviting some new nutrients and microbes into your life. Don't you think it's about time to join the millet party?

Recommended Reading:

- *Detox Cheap and Easy Without Fasting – Recipes Included*
- *How to Detoxify and Heal the Lymphatic System*

- *Holistic Guide to Healing the Endocrine System and Balancing Our Hormones*
- *Candida, Gut Flora, Allergies, and Disease*
- *How to Detoxify From Chemotherapy and Repair the Body*

Sources:

- *What Is Millet? 6 Reasons to Add it to Your Diet* – Global Healing Center
- *7 Amazing Benefits Of Millet* – Organic Facts
- *Is Millet the Next Super Grain?* – Civil Eats
- *Beware of Millet* – Healthy Home Economist
- *How Gut Bacteria Help Make Us Fat and Thin* – Scientific American