

# Gluten and the Diet

*A look at the claims and facts surrounding gluten from the Wheat Foods Council*

## About Gluten

Gluten is a term for certain amino acid sequences, commonly known as gliadin and glutenin. The gliadin fraction triggers an immune reaction in certain individuals. Gluten-containing ingredients are wheat, rye and barley. Because of mixing of crops in harvesting and production equipment, some oats contain gluten.

## Gluten Intolerance Facts

Gluten intolerance, or celiac sprue, is an intolerance of foods that contain gluten. It is not an allergy. This intolerance is an inherited, immune-mediated intolerance to dietary gluten.

- About 1% of the U.S. population is affected by gluten intolerance, or 3 million Americans.
- There has been a rise in diagnosed cases due to improved testing methods and greater public and health professional awareness.
- Symptoms are intestinal discomfort, poor absorption of nutrients, poor growth for children, loss of weight and when extreme, malnutrition.
- The only way to treat gluten intolerance is avoiding gluten ingredients and food in the diet.
- The marketplace for gluten-free foods has recently exploded with 987 products that were introduced in 2008, which is good news for those diagnosed with gluten intolerance.

Food label reading is essential for those with gluten intolerance.

- Products with the following ingredients should be avoided: wheat, barley, rye, oats, farina, flour, caramel color, enriched flour, cereal, hydrolyzed vegetable protein, malt flavoring or extracts, MSG, modified food starch, emulsifiers, stabilizers, distilled vinegar, semolina, durum, spelt, kamut and triticale.
- In 2006, FDA introduced the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act, mandating the labeling of the top eight food allergens, including wheat.
- In 2007, FDA proposed that gluten should be labeled at anything over 20mg per kg (20ppm). Although this rule has yet to be finalized, many companies are already voluntarily using this standard.

## Addressing the Claims

**Claim #1:** Gluten-free diets are good for weight reduction or maintenance.

### The Reality:

- Avoiding gluten, for those without an intolerance, can lead to a nutrient deficiency due to the elimination of an important, widely available set of foods, including bread, pasta and many cereals.
- Nutrient deficiencies may include iron, other minerals and B-vitamins.
- Gluten-free foods can be more expensive and are often higher in calories, which may lead to weight gain.
- Other grains, not containing gluten, have no caloric advantage over wheat; carbohydrates and proteins each have 4 calories per gram.

**Claim #2:** Genetically modified wheat could be the cause of an increase in the incidence of celiac sprue.

### The Reality:

- Genetically modified wheat is not present in the food stream and, therefore, cannot cause this disease.



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## Gluten-Free Dieting in the Media

Elisabeth Hasselbeck's book, *GFree Diet: A Gluten-Free Survival Guide*, and other celebrity diet fads have stirred some controversy, but claims made are unsubstantiated.

Janet Helm, a noted registered dietitian, authored a book titled, *Nutrition Unplugged: The G-Free Diet Doesn't Make the Grade*," which explains the health issues associated with a gluten-free diet. The information contained in this book is ground in science and therefore recommended by the Wheat Foods Council.

## Conclusion:

There is no scientifically proven reason to eliminate gluten from the diet other than to alleviate symptoms from celiac disease. There is no study that points to a gluten-free diet as a means of weight reduction or weight maintenance.

*In Conclusion*

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