

FOOD & MOOD

COACHING

WHAT'S THE GO WITH GLUTEN?

With the increase in awareness of Coeliac Disease, gluten sensitivity and wheat allergy, and a growing popularity in gluten-free foods, many of our members ask, 'should I avoid gluten?' and while this question in relation to you personally can only be answered by your qualified dietitian or medical practitioner, below we aim to provide insight into some commonly asked questions.

What is gluten?

Gluten is a family of proteins found in certain grains like wheat, barley, rye and wheat varieties like durum, semolina, couscous, bulgur and spelt. It acts as a binder, gives elasticity and texture to foods.

Cast your mind back to making glue in arts class at school – chances are you made glue out of flour and water. It is the gluten proteins in flour that give glue its stickiness.

It is common to find gluten in not only grain/four products such as pasta, cereal, bread and pastries but also in sauces, salad dressings, soups, processed meats, cheese, sweets, ice-cream, ice blocks and beer and wine (who knew!?).

Are there benefits of going gluten-free?

For the 1 in 70 Australians who are affected by Coeliac Disease (coeliac.org.au), and another 20-30% estimated to experience Non-Coeliac Gluten Sensitivity, being gluten-free is necessary to avoid serious health consequences.

Coeliac Disease

People with Coeliac Disease have an immune reaction to gluten. The severity of this reaction causes autoimmune responses, meaning the body's immune system attacks its own tissues. This abnormal immune reaction causes the naturally long finger-like projections of the intestinal wall (microvilli) to become stunted and can lead to destruction of the gut lining itself.

This can lead to leaky gut and other inflammatory issues. It also leads to malabsorption of vital micronutrients that are absorbed by the ordinarily large surface area of the microvilli. Without a large surface area for absorption in the gut, we lack nourishment, leading to insufficiencies and deficiencies – common deficiencies related to coeliac disease include iron and b12. Common digestive symptoms include bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhoea and/or constipation.

The issues faced by a coeliac are not just isolated to gastrointestinal issues; they can extend to affect organ function, brain function, skin and joint issues.

Genetic testing can play a big part in determining the predisposition to coeliac disease. If left untreated, this may lead to micronutrient deficiencies like anaemia and brittle bones, infertility, type 1 diabetes, and nerve damage. A strict gluten-free diet is one way to prevent further damage or promote healing.



FOOD & MOOD

COACHING

Non-Coeliac Gluten Sensitivity (NCGS)

People with NCGS do not test positive for a gluten allergy (Coeliac Disease) but can present with the same bodily symptoms as someone who is Coeliac. By removing gluten from their diet, they experience relief from some of their symptoms. Researchers at Monash University are looking closely into NCGS with the aim of identifying clinical markers that might help with identification and clinical diagnosis of NCGS.

Wheat allergy

Wheat allergy is often confused with Coeliac Disease but is unrelated. It involves an allergic reaction to the proteins in wheat that include but are not limited to gluten. It can be detected through a food challenge test or and immunoglobulin E (IgE) test. Symptoms manifest like any other types of allergies like itching, swelling, dizziness, shortness of breath, cramps and diarrhoea. This is commonly found in children and can be outgrown when they enter adolescence.

Should everyone avoid gluten?

For people outside of the above groups, research shows that there is no reason to avoid gluten, especially the many wholefoods that naturally contain gluten such as wholegrain pasta, artisan bread, bulgur wheat, couscous that contain many health promoting benefits.

A gluten-free life

For person who have Coeliac Disease, are allergic and sensitive, it is essential to follow a gluten-free diet.

There are many natural wholefoods that naturally free from gluten such as:

- + Vegetables and fruits
- + Legumes, nuts and seeds
- + Fish, poultry, eggs and lean meats
- + Whole grains like quinoa, unpolished rice, amaranth, buckwheat, millet, sorghum and gluten-free oats
- + Starchy roots like potatoes, sweet potatoes and cassava
- + Corn and polenta

If you are experiencing some discomforts or symptoms that may be related to gluten sensitivity or intolerance, you must always seek professional advice from an accredited dietitian or physician first before going on a gluten-free diet to ensure that all your nutritional needs are met.

