

The Gluten Free Movement: Fact or Fad? by Megan Burpo

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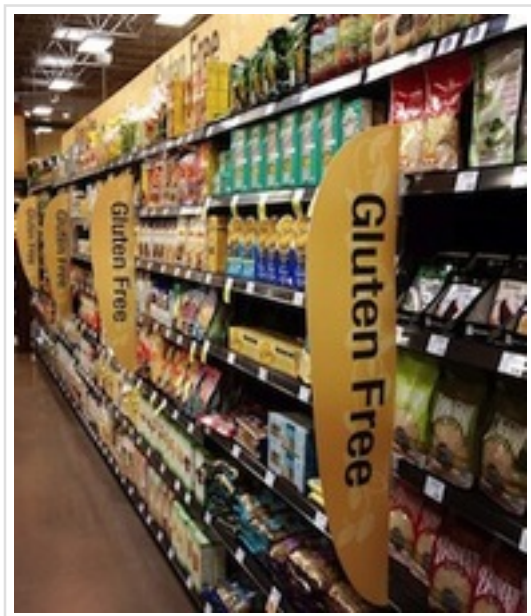


Going gluten-free has become one of America's latest trends sitting right in-between Miley Cyrus's tongue and high-waisted shorts. Celebrities are swearing by the new diet and alternative cookbooks are rapidly taking over bookstore shelves.

The reality is that only 1% (http://www.celiaccentral.org/ceeliac-disease/facts-and-figures/) of Americans have diagnosed celiac disease, meaning their bodies cannot process gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley. Interestingly enough, 30% of Americans (http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2503360/One-3-Americans-gluten-free-1-celiac-disease.html) choose to avoid gluten. Whether this 29% of America truly have intolerance or have fallen for the idea that “gluten-free equals healthy,” PR and marketing professionals have wasted no time in jumping on the bandwagon.

As a person who spent two months completely gluten, dairy, and egg free, I have observed the increase in advertising and options for this consumer driven trend. Just five years ago (http://www.foodallergy.org/document.doc?id=194) an individual with celiac disease would have few options that met the requirements, let alone be appetizing. Now it seems like companies paste the phrase “gluten-free” in 60-point font on the cover of any box they can find. Gluten-free Girl Scout cookies, gluten-free beer, gluten-free everything. General Mills Rice Chex cereal has been made the same way since 1937. Recently the notion of it being gluten-free appears a novelty and can be found as the top description on any label or web search of the brand. What has changed in the increased promotion of companies' accessibility to food sensitivities is the increase in a wider range in customers. Some companies, such as Udi's, have focused most of their efforts recently on creating gluten-free foods.

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Not only is access to gluten-free items being put into the public mind, but also the notion that gluten-free is a step to creating a healthy lifestyle. Good PR is appealing to everyone, and everyone loves a new diet trend. It's a way to become excited and motivated about losing weight. Still, eating pounds of rice instead of slices of bread truly doesn't make the largest weight difference. But if the diet blogs and cookbooks say it will, then people will continue to try and to buy. Phrases such as “cleanse” and “detox” have infiltrated the brains of thousands of Americans to the point where the first step in curing an illness is now to go gluten-free. What these thousands of Americans are not being told is the serious health implications that come with not getting the correct nutrients. They feel the benefits of decreased processed foods and

increased natural items such as fruits and vegetables. It is the same health advice that has been given for years except it is hidden under expensive packaging and a nice label.

To those with gluten intolerance or allergies there is no complaining about the increased awareness and the abundance of food that appears every day. I thank PR professionals everywhere for giving me a hamburger bun worth eating again. But to those who find no real medical complications with eating a breadstick, I say put down the \$6.00 Trader Joe's cookie and savor the authenticity of wheat in moderation.

Edited by Katharina Elberti, Webmaster and Editor-in-Chief 2014-2015



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