



Food and Nutrition Myths: Gluten Free

Myth: Going gluten free is healthy and can help me lose weight
Answer: Gluten-free diets aren't necessarily healthier for the general population.

Gluten-free (GF) diets are important for people who have been diagnosed with celiac disease because consuming gluten destroys the lining of their digestive tract, leading to serious and potentially fatal malnutrition. In addition to celiacs – who make up about 1% of the population – another small group of people may have what's called “non-celiac gluten sensitivity” and may need to avoid or limit gluten.

However, leading experts on gluten, celiac and digestion state categorically that 93–99% of us have no medical reason to avoid gluten. So it's important to know that gluten-free diets aren't necessarily healthier for the general population. Following a GF diet without the supervision of a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) may result in a lack of fiber, certain B vitamins, calcium and other nutrients.

And don't be fooled by processed gluten-free products on the market, especially baked goods like cookies, cakes and breads. Many of them have added fats, sugars and starches to make them taste better, which adds up to more calories, so they may not be the best choice if you're trying to lose weight. If that isn't bad enough, you may pay extra for them – in some cases 2-1/2 times more than the original product! The only place you'll lose weight will be in your wallet.

Even if you're in that small minority who can't digest gluten, the good news is that not all grains contain gluten. Only wheat, rye, barley, and triticale (a wheat/rye hybrid) contain the gluten proteins. For the rest of us, it's simply a good idea to add variety in the grains we eat, just as a variety of fruits and vegetables is important. That's why everyone should celebrate and enjoy a wide range of delicious, nutritious whole grains. Popular gluten-free grains include amaranth, buckwheat, corn, quinoa, millet, brown rice, sorghum and wild rice. Nutritionally, whole grains contain vitamins and nutrients as well as dietary fiber that can keep you feeling fuller longer.

Here's to your good health!



WHICH GRAINS ARE GLUTEN-FREE?

It's important to note that gluten-intolerant people CAN eat whole grains. In fact, as you'll see from the list below, a large number of gluten-free grain choices are available. The GF grains below are gluten-free whole grains, when they are consumed with all of their bran, germ, and endosperm.

GRAINS WITH GLUTEN

- Wheat, including varieties like spelt, kamut, farro and durum; and products like bulgur, semolina
- Barley
- Rye
- Triticale (a wheat/rye hybrid)

GLUTEN-FREE GRAINS

- Amaranth
- Buckwheat
- Corn
- Job's Tears (or Hato Mugi)
- Millet
- Montina (Indian rice grass)
- Oats*
- Quinoa
- Rice
- Sorghum
- Teff
- Wild Rice

*Oats are inherently gluten-free, but are frequently contaminated with wheat during growing or processing. Several companies offer pure, uncontaminated oats. Ask your physician if these oats are acceptable for you.