

Why is Wheat Gluten Disorder on the Rise?

A study using frozen blood samples taken from Air Force recruits 50 years ago has found that intolerance of wheat gluten, a debilitating digestive condition, is four times more common today than it was in the 1950's.

The findings contradict the conventional wisdom that the sharp increase in diagnoses of wheat gluten intolerance has come about because of greater awareness and detection. It now seems likely that dramatic changes in the American diet have played a role.

The disease occurs in people whose bodies cannot digest gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. The undigested protein triggers the immune system to attack the lining of the small intestine, causing diarrhea, nausea and abdominal pain.

The researchers who conducted the study also found that the recruits who had the undiagnosed digestive disorder, called celiac disease, had a four-fold increase in their risk of death.



Sources:

- » [Minneapolis Star Tribune July 1, 2009](#)
- » [Gastroenterology July 2009; 137\(1\):88-93](#)



Dr. Mercola's Comments:

According to [statistics](#) from the University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center, an average of one out of every 133 otherwise healthy people in the United States suffers from the digestive disease known as celiac disease (CD).

Previous studies have found that this number may be as high as [1 in 33 in at-risk populations](#).

Unfortunately, despite its rapidly increasing prevalence, it still takes an average of four years to reach a diagnosis if you're symptomatic. This delay in proper diagnosis can dramatically increase your risk of developing other diseases such as autoimmune disorders, neurological problems, osteoporosis, and even cancer.

For example, if you're diagnosed with celiac disease after the age of 20, your chances of developing an autoimmune condition skyrocket from the average 3.5 percent to 34 percent.

Additionally, according to this latest study, undiagnosed CD was associated with a nearly four-fold increased risk of premature death.

What Causes Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease, also more casually referred to as wheat- or gluten intolerance, occurs when your body cannot digest gluten, a protein most commonly found in wheat, rye and barley. However, it's very important to realize that these are not the only culprits that can cause severe problems. Other grains such as oats and spelt also contain gluten, and gluten can be found in countless processed foods without being labeled as such.

"Gluten" comes from the Greek word for glue, and its adhesive properties hold bread and cake together. But those same properties interfere with the breakdown and absorption of nutrients, including the nutrients from other foods in the same meal.

The result is a glued-together constipating lump in your gut rather than a nutritious, easily digested meal.

The undigested gluten then triggers your immune system to attack the lining of your small intestine, which can cause symptoms like diarrhea or constipation, nausea, and abdominal pain.

In more recent years it's been shown that the condition can also cause a much wider array of symptoms that are not gastrointestinal in nature, further complicating proper diagnosis.

Over time, your small intestine becomes increasingly damaged and less able to absorb nutrients such as iron and calcium. This in turn can lead to anemia, osteoporosis and other health problems.

The rapid increase in celiac disease and milder forms of gluten intolerance is no surprise considering the modern Western diet, which consists in large part of grain carbohydrates.

Additionally, modern wheat is very different from the wheat your ancestors ate. The proportion of gluten protein in [wheat](#) has increased enormously as a result of hybridization.

Until the 19th century, wheat was also usually mixed with other grains, beans and nuts; pure wheat flour has been milled into refined white flour only during the last 200 years.

The resulting high-gluten, refined grain diet most of you have eaten since infancy was simply not part of the diet of previous generations.

The Many Symptoms of Gluten-Intolerance

In addition to nausea, diarrhea, constipation and abdominal pain, celiac disease may manifest clinically with an array of non-gastrointestinal symptoms, such as:

Osteoporosis or osteopenia	Tooth enamel defects	Vitamin K deficiency
Central and peripheral nervous system disease	Dementia, and impairments in mental functioning that could cause or aggravate autism, Asperger's syndrome, ADD or schizophrenia	Dermatitis Herpetiformis (DH), a skin condition that causes intense itching and blistering
Anemia of various types	Infertility, and earlier menopause	Organ disorders
Weight loss or gain	Depression	Fatigue

How to Treat Gluten Intolerance and Celiac Disease

The treatment for celiac disease or gluten intolerance is a gluten-free diet, which means abstaining from grains and any food that contains gluten. A blood test can verify whether or not you actually have the condition.

Typically, avoiding gluten for a week or two is enough to see significant improvement.

However, in my experience, about 75-80 percent of ALL people benefit from avoiding grains, even whole sprouted grains, whether you have a gluten intolerance or not. This is because, typically, grains rapidly break down to sugar, which causes rises in insulin that exacerbate health problems such as:

- Overweight
- High cholesterol
- High blood pressure
- Type 2 diabetes
- Cancer

The only consistent exceptions would be those whose [nutritional type](#) is a carb type and you don't suffer symptoms of intolerance. However, it's still important to realize that there is a major difference between vegetable carbs and grain carbs, even though they're both referenced as "carbs." Unlike vegetables, grains convert to sugar, which is not something anyone needs in their diet in high amounts.

The rising prevalence of celiac disease is clear evidence that we're simply not designed to consume such vast amounts of starch- and sugar-rich foods so many now indulge in.

In short, most people are consuming far too much bread, cereal, pasta, [corn](#) (a grain, not a vegetable), rice, potatoes and Little Debbie snack cakes, with very grave health consequences.

Yes, this even includes organic stone ground whole grains. Obviously these are healthier for you for a large number of reasons, but ultimately they cause the same problems through two mechanisms. Reaction to the protein gliadin in the wheat, and adverse impact on insulin metabolism.

The fact is that [two-thirds of the U.S. population is overweight](#) or obese, and [one in four Americans is diabetic or pre-diabetic](#). These are clear signs that our diets have strayed too far from the norm of what your body actually needs.

Fortunately there are communities in the US where overweight people are the minority. I spent ten days in Aspen, Colorado in early July and my guess is that less than 5 percent of the population is overweight. Of course many European communities have levels this low, but it is very uncommon in the US.

Hidden Sources of Gluten

In order to combat gluten intolerance, it's not enough to simply avoid grains. You must also pay attention to the *quality* of all the other foods you eat.

Remember, 90 percent of the money Americans spend on food is for processed foods. When you choose foods like this, not only are you bound to experience physical complications in one way or another, but if you have celiac disease it's even more imperative you avoid processed foods due to hidden gluten.

Unfortunately, food manufacturers are not required by law to identify all possible sources of gluten on their product labels, so reading the label may not be enough.

Gluten may still be hiding in processed foods like ready-made soups, soy sauce, candies, cold cuts, and various low- and no-fat products, just to name a few, under labels such as:

- Malts
- Starches
- Hydrolyzed vegetable protein (HVP)
- Texturized vegetable protein (TVP)
- Natural flavoring

Celiac.com has a long [list of label ingredients that typically contain hidden gluten](#).

For helpful tips and guidelines on how to approach food companies for more detailed information about their ingredients, see [The Gluten Solution site](#). They also offer more detailed information about the current state of gluten-free labeling legislation.

That said, your best bet is to stick to a diet of fresh, whole foods (preferably [organic](#) whenever possible). Not only will you keep your celiac disease under control, but you will also experience numerous other benefits such as increased energy, enhanced mood, and a lower risk of chronic illness.

If you want more information about celiac disease, the following web sites are good places to start:

- www.celiaccenter.org
- www.celiac.com
- UK Web site for sufferers of celiac disease: www.coeliac.co.uk

Source: <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2009/07/23/Why-is-Wheat-Gluten-Disorder-on-the-Rise.aspx>