

Should you go gluten free?

People go gluten free for a variety of reasons, and by far the most important reason to give up gluten is if your bodies makes antibodies against it, as that means you may have an auto-immune disease triggered by gluten intake.

First, let's clarify, what is gluten. Gluten is a protein found in all products made from wheat, rye, and barley—wheat flour is by far the most prevalent source of gluten and is used by most of the food industry in thousands of processed foods.

Second, let's clarify what is an auto-immune disease. An auto-immune disease means your body makes antibodies that attack and damage your own tissues. Many auto-immune diseases are both disabling and deadly, including multiple sclerosis and inflammatory bowel disease, which may be triggered by eating gluten in a gluten sensitive person.

Gluten sensitivity is poorly understood and vastly more serious than an ordinary food intolerance. Let's use lactose intolerance-- the most common of the food intolerances--- as a comparison.

Lactase is the enzyme you need to digest milk sugar (lactose), and when you don't have lactase, consuming milk, ice cream, and other dairy products makes you gassy and bloated. For some people it can also result in painful abdominal cramps. But other than some annoying symptoms, eating dairy doesn't kill you. Gluten, however, is a different story.

Gluten as noted is a protein that is found in wheat, rye, and barley. Every time you eat one of these three grains you are consuming gluten. If you are gluten sensitive, which is about 20% of the US population, then your immune system "sees" the gluten protein and treats it like a foreign invader, making antibodies that attack the gluten foreigner. By itself this wouldn't be such a bad thing—except that many of these antibodies get confused and attack not just the gluten, but your body's own tissues. These antibodies can wreak havoc on your gut lining, joints, thyroid, sinuses, and even your brain.

When you have gluten sensitivity, you essentially have a form of an auto-immune disease. Eat gluten even once, and it has the potential to cause your immune system to attack your tissues for the next 20-30 days. You may only eat gluten once every two weeks, yet you may have symptoms all the time, because the antibody attack is relentless.

The symptoms of gluten sensitivity include:

- Gastrointestinal issues: bloating, gassy, abdominal pain
- Brain fog, anxiety, or depression
- Achy joints
- Sinus congestion

- Fatigue
- Weight gain and resistant weight loss (they do everything right but still can't lose weight)
- Eczema and psoriasis rashes.

You could have all of these symptoms, or only 1-2. At the Masley Optimal Health Center, anyone with chronic, unexplained symptoms noted above deserves laboratory testing, or a gluten-free elimination diet trial for a minimal of 3-4 weeks. The first challenge is many people try to follow a gluten-free diet and get cross-contaminated and fail to really go gluten-free—I had to try going gluten-free three times before I made it for at least one month. We now provide counseling for people following a gluten-free diet, but it takes extensive education to do this properly.

The second challenge is that many doctors order an outdated blood test for gluten sensitivity, namely TTG antibody (tissue transglutaminase antibody), which commonly misses people with known gluten sensitivity. If the test is positive, you have gluten sensitivity; the problem is that many people have this issue and the test is negative. Not only can you react to gluten protein, but your body breaks gluten down into many other smaller protein particles, and you can react to these gluten metabolites, too. In our clinic, we use a laboratory called Cyrex Laboratories that is able to test for multiple gluten metabolites and antibodies, so it's important to make sure you get the right test. The problem is of course expense, around \$400 and up, and typically this isn't covered by medical insurance.

I usually give my patients ongoing symptoms above the following choice, (1) give up gluten totally for one month and see if you feel better, or take the Cyrex test (I don't even bother with the TTG test noted above) which is more definitive. The problem is that it isn't that easy to go gluten-free. Have one shot of soy sauce (it has gluten in it) or eat in a restaurant where wheat flour was on the counter where your dish was prepared and you have been contaminated, and have to start over. Many people think they went gluten-free, but never made it. Many products that don't have gluten ingredients are contaminated with gluten protein. So unless you are ultra-careful, testing is the way to go to confirm this diagnosis.

If you are gluten sensitive and you eat gluten products, then it's highly likely that your immune system is attacking your own tissues. If you have celiac disease, your immune system is attacking your gut and you damage your small intestine, then that is called celiac disease. Many people have the mistaken idea that if they have an intestinal biopsy and they don't have celiac disease, then they can eat gluten—sorry, not really. If antibodies attack your brain, you may get multiple sclerosis (your brain is damaged and looks like Swiss cheese with holes in it (scattered brain plaques)). Gluten sensitivity may lead to lymphoma (cancer), thyroid problems, and it can make you feel groggy, achy—awful. People who are gluten sensitive and keep eating gluten are very inflamed, which slows their metabolism and promotes weight gain.

So the bottom line is that gluten sensitivity is a potentially life-threatening auto-immune disease. Please don't confuse it with something fairly annoying like lactose intolerance.

And the results from people who are gluten sensitive who go gluten free are really amazing. Consider these results:

- A man covered in a body wide eczema rash had his skin totally clear when he went gluten free.
- A woman who couldn't lose weight with exercise and dieting lost 50 pounds when she went gluten free.
- A woman with years of gastrointestinal pain and bloating, often forcing her to miss work and her children's sporting events felt totally normal after giving up gluten.
- A man with bad joint pain, who also had arthritis, was considering a joint replacement, but didn't notice any joint pain after giving up gluten.

So if you, or a loved one, suffer from the symptoms related to gluten sensitivity above, I strongly encourage you to either follow a real gluten free trial, or to have definitive testing for gluten sensitivity.

What if you test positive for gluten sensitivity?

If you test positive for gluten, then absolutely give it up completely. Don't limit your intake, avoid it 100%. To get started, do a search for gluten containing foods and products, it is hiding in many places you may not suspect. There are endless resources to help you go gluten free—especially now that 20% of Americans are gluten sensitive.

At home, if you avoid processed food and you read labels carefully, you can avoid most gluten. The challenge is that many flours (especially in packaged foods) may be contaminated, so giving up flour helps you give up gluten.

When you eat away from home, it gets more challenging. So what do you do about it?

Well, up until now, not a lot! Except make all of your own meals, don't go to restaurants, don't eat at friends' homes and basically be a prisoner to your gluten sensitivity. But this is not how I want you to live. You should have support and help so you can enjoy food, eat out and not have to worry.

The fact that many restaurants now have gluten free menus really helps. But what about trace amounts of contamination even if you order from the gluten free menu.

What's new is that now there is a product designed to digest gluten proteins that are hiding in you food. You can protect yourself from hidden sources of gluten with a product called Gluten Shield, your secret weapon against this damaging ingredient!

This is the one-of-a-kind digestive enzyme on the market shown to produce 99% digestion of all 8 major antigens (wheat, dairy, soy, egg, nuts, fish, hemp, pea) within 90 minutes.

[If you'd like to try Glutenza, click here.](#)

Just keep in mind that taking Gluten Shield doesn't mean you can go back to ordering the bread basket in a restaurant. Glutenza will cover tiny amounts of gluten contamination hiding in food. It won't cover

you eating a platter of gluten packed pasta! But if you could digest and remove occasional gluten contamination, that is a huge benefit for many people with gluten sensitivity.

Take heart, this is a huge issue and a big movement. Every few months there are new tips to help people stay gluten free. Stay tuned!

I wish you the best of health!

Steven Masley, MD, FAHA, FACN, FAAFP, CNS