

NOTES

*First thoughts, running arguments, stories
in progress*

Why Go Gluten Free?

Readers discuss the health craze and share their own experiences with giving up gluten. Join them via hello@theatlantic.com.



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OLDEST FIRST

Chris Bodenner

9:45 AM / May 19, 2016

The Collateral Benefits of the GF Craze

The vast majority of people who avoid gluten don't have celiac disease or even a gluten sensitivity, but as reader Rachel can attest, there's a big upside to the proliferation of all the GF products and menus fueled by the fad (even as Hamblin noted the [downsides](#)):

I found out 10 years ago this month that I had Celiac. I was having horrible stomach pain, reflux, ulcers, etc, and at 19 I had zero quality of life. My biopsy came back positive for Celiac but my blood-work was negative, so my doctors weren't sure at the time how to diagnose me.

Going gluten-free 10 years ago was one of the most overwhelming and terrifying things I had ever experienced. My doctor flat told me I could continue to eat gluten but I would most likely develop colon cancer by the time I was 40.

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Chris Bodenner

11:15 AM / May 18, 2016

Going Gluten Free

Reader Dean says [hello@](#):

You asked, so here's my gluten-free story (safe for Celiacs to read):

I'm not a Celiac, but I do have Crohn's disease, an inflammatory autoimmune disorder which often causes similar symptoms in the digestive tract. When I was first diagnosed with Crohn's, a course of steroids followed by immunosuppressive drugs was enough to keep me in relatively good health.

Slowly, though, my symptoms returned. After two years, I was again underweight and anemic (a six-foot-tall male in my twenties, I weighed about 130 pounds at my lightest), with chronic, debilitating stomach pains and other symptoms which made my life very hard.

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Chris Bodenner

9:15 AM / May 17, 2016

The Harm in Blindly 'Going Gluten Free,' Cont'd

"Gluten Free Ebola" - South Park Preview



Jim Hamblin [has a new piece up](#) for Celiac-Disease Awareness Month. Money quote:

[Avoiding gluten] has not been shown (in placebo-controlled studies) to benefit people who do not have the disease. Celiac disease is known to affect about one percent of people. Yet in a global survey of 30,000 people last year, fully [21 percent](#) said that “gluten free” was a “very important” characteristic in their food choices. Among Millennials, the number is closer to one in three. The tendency to “avoid gluten” [persists](#) across socioeconomic strata, in households earning more than

\$75,000 just the same as those earning less than \$30,000, and almost evenly among educational attainment. The most common [justification](#) for doing so: “no reason.”

He goes on to detail the downsides of gluten-free replica products. A reader responds with a solid bit of advice:

As someone who has had a lifelong gluten allergy (and gave it to two of my three kids), the increased “trendiness” is a mixed bag. Yes, it means more choices, but it also means that people think my disease is just a trendy lifestyle choice and not a real thing. My general recommendation is not to use too many wheat substitutes. Instead of a gluten-free sandwich, have a salad or meat and veg. Instead of beer, have wine or hard liquor.

One of my part-time jobs right out of college, while interning and waiting tables, was doing research for a book that my roommate and his celiac-suffering business partner were putting together to help people [travel and dine out gluten free](#). This was late 2004, and I had never heard of gluten, nor had any peers I talked to about the research gig. So over the past decade it’s been remarkable to see how rapidly and widespread “gluten free” has become. Now my best friend is GF, for

dermatological reasons, as is my mother, who swears that her GF diet has snuffed out some mild health problems—and she’s been a nurse for 40 years, so she’s very science- and health-oriented. Here’s another gluten-free reader who works in the sciences:

I work in human research. Getting people to keep accurate records of what they eat, or to maintain a specific diet for a long enough time without keeping them in a lab environment 24/7 is incredibly difficult if not impossible. I am gluten-free due to promising science on Hashimoto’s thyroiditis (I am not celiac). If you have a problem linked to inflammation, it makes sense to see if going gluten-free can reduce that inflammation.

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