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THE BLOG



The Downside of Gluten-Freeing Your Kids

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The gluten-free food industry has seen tremendous growth, and while celiac disease — which requires lifelong complete avoidance of gluten — is also on the

or any other medical reason to avoid gluten n-free boom.

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by trend?

ector of the Celiac Disease Center at
a [commentary in the *Journal of Pediatrics*,
adults](#). “No reason” is the most common
nt of those surveyed explained their choice
Just so. 20 percent choose gluten-free food because they think it’s a healthier
option, and 19 percent perceive it as better for digestive health.



If gluten-free foods are indeed a healthy trend, the fact that [20 percent of Americans are seeking them](#) for no medical reason might be a good thing. If, on the other hand, gluten free carries risk, this fad might be an expensive gamble.

The risk of gluten free

For people who do not have celiac, wheat allergy, or non-celiac gluten sensitivity, there is no data to support the notion that gluten free is healthy, states Dr. Reilly. In fact, packaged gluten-free food often contains [more sugar and fat](#), and has higher caloric density. Contrary to what people believe, going gluten free without medical supervision can lead to packing extra weight, to insulin resistance, and to [vitamin deficiencies](#), since gluten-free foods are [not fortified](#) the way wheat is.

And then there’s arsenic. Gluten-free diets often rely heavily on rice, and [rice quite often, contains arsenic, which comes from the soil](#). The amounts are small, and probably not a problem if one eats a varied diet, but on a gluten-free diet rice becomes the predominant grain, and that can be especially problematic for babies and pregnant women.

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A gluten-free diet, just like many other exclusion diets, comes with a quality of life price tag. And these specialty foods often cost more and are sold at a premium.

And since in kids there are only two indications for excluding gluten from the diet: celiac disease and wheat allergy (non-celiac gluten sensitivity has not been described in kids), putting kids on this diet carries risk with no apparent benefits.

There is no support to the misconception that gluten is toxic, and no evidence that gluten-free diets treat a myriad of afflictions such as autism, arthritis or obesity.

Dr. Reilly concludes:

“Patients self-prescribing a GFD (gluten-free diet) should be counseled as to the possible financial, social, and nutritional consequences of unnecessary implementation.”

The food industry uses the health halo of the gluten free label to better sell. It's really important to emphasize that just like one knows that foods that are peanut free are not generally healthier, gluten-free foods are not a panacea; avoiding gluten isn't a recipe for health for those of us who don't have a sensitivity or autoimmunity that involves gluten.

Dr. Ayala

This is a crosspost of my blog, [Healthy Food & Healthy Living](#), where you can reach me at ayala@herbalwater.com.

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