



# Could gluten BE AFFECTING YOU?

## BLOATING, BRAIN FOG, EXHAUSTION, DIGESTIVE DISORDERS? YOU COULD BE GLUTEN INTOLERANT

You may be forgiven for thinking that the hype about gluten sensitivity is a fashionable fad, however, as a Nutritional Therapist I have studied the evidence and found from my clinic experience that coeliac disease and non-coeliac gluten sensitivity pose a significant health problem for an increasing number of people.

It was previously thought that gluten only affected the digestive system, however, it is now known that gluten may cause a diverse range of health problems. Signs and symptoms of gluten sensitivity may include:

- Anaemia
- Mouth ulcers, sore tongue and mouth
- Indigestion, reflux, abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhoea, constipation
- Fatigue, weakness
- Infertility, miscarriage
- Anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, brain fog, mood swings, panic attacks
- Osteoporosis
- Autoimmune illnesses

In many of my clients I have seen all sorts of conditions – including indigestion, reflux, IBS, dermatitis, urticaria (hives), eczema, psoriasis, fatigue, thyroid imbalances and brain fog, clear or dramatically improve on a gluten-free diet. Going gluten-free can also be the key to losing weight for some people.



It is important to distinguish between coeliac disease and non-coeliac gluten sensitivity. Coeliac disease is an autoimmune condition caused by a genetically determined, permanent intolerance to gluten resulting in inflammatory damage to the small intestine. It is a lifelong condition which requires a totally gluten-free diet. However, there are also an increasing number of people suffering from non-coeliac gluten sensitivity which may be due to impaired digestion of gluten and which may not be permanent if the gastrointestinal system is supported and repaired. However, clinically I find that many clients who remove gluten and feel dramatically better prefer to remain gluten free. Coeliac disease and non-coeliac gluten sensitivity can be a contributory factor in a wide range of conditions, a few of which are explored in more detail below:

### GLUTEN AND THE DIGESTIVE SYSTEM

There is now evidence that gluten causes inflammation in the gut in every one of us, even in people who aren't gluten sensitive. For some people this isn't a problem as their bodies effectively repair the gut, however, for other people the damage can not be repaired properly and symptoms start to develop. The amount of gluten consumed may be a significant factor – the inflammation takes 3-4 hours to heal so if you are eating Weetabix for breakfast, a sandwich for lunch, pasta for dinner and a biscuit before bed your gut can end up in a constant state of inflammation.

New research in the journal GUT revealed that the presence of gluten sensitivity was 42.4% in people with IBS, 29% in Crohn's Disease, 25.3% in Ulcerative Colitis and 18.3% for Gastrointestinal Reflux Disease. As coeliac disease causes malabsorption, persistent anaemia of unknown causes may also be an indication of coeliac disease and should be checked out.

The effects of gluten on the digestive system can also extend to the rest of the body, resulting for example in autoimmune conditions. In addition to causing inflammation, gluten activates zonulin, a substance which makes the lining of the intestines more permeable. This increased intestinal permeability, or leaky gut as it is often called, allows undigested food and toxins to get into the bloodstream leading to multiple food intolerances and dramatically increasing the risk of autoimmune conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's and Hashimoto's Thyroiditis. In fact, many experts now believe that almost everyone with an autoimmune condition is suffering from leaky gut and in some of those people gluten may well be part of the problem.

### THE THYROID CONNECTION

There is a particular link between gluten sensitivity and autoimmune thyroid disease. Gluten has a similar chemical make up to the tissue of the thyroid gland, so in gluten sensitive people, the immune system attacks gluten but it can also mistake the thyroid gland for gluten which triggers the synthesis of antibodies designed to attack the thyroid. Ideally, everyone with thyroid antibodies should be tested for gluten intolerance or do a gluten-free trial to ascertain whether the antibodies decrease. I have seen an increasing number of hypothyroid clients who have antibodies to their thyroid gland and I would ideally recommend antibody testing for everyone with hypothyroidism. Some GP's are able to offer this test but otherwise it can be arranged privately via Nutritional Therapists such as myself.

### GLUTEN SENSITIVITY, INFERTILITY AND MISCARRIAGE

Whilst there are many possible reasons for infertility or miscarriage, gluten sensitivity is worth considering, particularly for women who suffer from recurrent miscarriages or who are having difficulty conceiving. Several studies have revealed that there is an increased risk of miscarriage in undiagnosed coeliac women and that adherence to a gluten-free diet significantly reduces the risk of miscarriage and supports a successful pregnancy. The studies have been done on women with coeliac disease rather than those with non-coeliac gluten sensitivity, however, for women trying to conceive who have a history of recurrent miscarriage, coeliac testing or a gluten-free diet may be beneficial.

### THE BONE LINK

According to a study in the Archives of Internal Medicine, due to the increased incidence of coeliac disease in people with osteoporosis, everyone with osteoporosis should be screened for coeliac disease. The researchers also discovered that in the patients with coeliac disease, a year on a gluten-free diet significantly improved bone mineral density.

### CROSS-REACTIVE FOODS:

Sometimes people with coeliac disease or non-coeliac gluten sensitivity continue to experience symptoms despite being gluten free. This may be due to sensitivity to one or more cross-reactive foods including dairy, soy, sesame, yeast, corn, coffee, rice, potato, oats and others. This occurs because these foods provoke a similar immune response in some people to gluten. For example, about 50% of coeliac patients may experience symptoms from eating casein in dairy.

Another reason for continuing symptoms in people with coeliac disease or non-coeliac gluten sensitivity despite a gluten-free diet is that the underlying inflammation and permeability within the gut has not been addressed. This is an area that we can help with as Nutritional Therapists.

### GLUTEN-FREE ALTERNATIVES:

Due to the increase in coeliac disease and gluten sensitivity there are an abundance of gluten-free products on the market, some of which are much healthier than others. Many people actually eat more grains than they need so going gluten free can be an opportunity to reduce grain intake, experiment with other foods and clean up the diet. Gluten is also hidden in many other foods such as sausages, sauces, condiments, stock cubes, gravy, cakes, biscuits, cereals, cereal bars and crisps to name a few so it is important to read labels. Also, contrary to popular belief, couscous, rye and spelt are not gluten free.

Here are a few of the healthier gluten-free options:

**Grains:** Buckwheat, quinoa, brown rice, oats (gluten free).

**Bread and crackers:** AMISA Buckwheat crispbreads (available from Greens Healthfoods), gluten-free oat cakes, rice cakes, gluten-free bread.

**Pasta/noodles:** Buckwheat, rice. I tend to recommend these rather than corn pasta as corn is a common allergen.

**Baking:** Dove's Farm gluten-free flour, ground almonds, gluten-free oats, buckwheat flour, rice flour, coconut flour, gram flour (chickpea).

### WHAT ABOUT TESTING?

Currently conventional testing for Gluten-Reactivity and Coeliac disease includes serum IgG and IgA against gliadin and tissue transglutaminase-2 (tTG2). These antibodies are measured against a wheat protein called alpha-gliadin. Whilst these tests can be helpful, the situation is more complex as wheat is made up of many proteins including, alpha-gliadin, omega-gliadin, glutenin, gluteomorphin, prodynorphin, and agglutinins. Any of these can be the problem but if only alpha gliadin is tested and you don't react to that particular part of gluten the test may give inaccurate results, i.e a false negative.

The new Cyrex Wheat/Gluten Proteome screen measures antibody production against nine wheat proteins and three essential structure enzymes making it one of the most innovative and accurate tests available. Cyrex Labs also offer testing for cross-reactive foods.

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