Gluten-free Diet

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, barley, and derivatives of these grains. A gluten-free diet is traditionally used to treat individuals that suffer from Celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder of the small intestine that is triggered by an individual’s intolerance or hypersensitivity to gluten.

Celiac disease can manifest in a variety of symptoms, from gastrointestinal to neurological, and if left untreated, may develop into other autoimmune diseases including thyroid disease or even cancer. In some cases, individuals may not experience any signs or symptoms after consuming gluten, even as damage to the small intestines may be occurring.

Common symptoms of Celiac include abdominal bloating, gas, diarrhea, pale stools, weight loss, stomach pain, skin rashes, anemia, chronic fatigue, brain fog, seizures, tingling sensations, ulcers, amenorrhea, and muscle, joint, bone cramps, and pains.

It’s important to note that one does not have to have full-blown Celiac disease to experience these symptoms. Many people are varying levels of gluten-intolerant, and although they do not test positive for Celiac, may experience a great improvement in health by eliminating it from their diet.

While following a gluten-free diet, it’s very important to be cautious of cross-contamination. This can happen during the manufacturing process or at home if proper care is not taken during preparation. A common example of this is oats. Oats are inherently gluten-free, however, they are often contaminated with wheat during the growing and processing stages. It’s always best to read labels and contact the manufacturer if there is any doubt. Your level of intolerance will dictate how scrupulous you need to be when it comes to cross-contamination.

Those following a gluten-free diet are encouraged to eat lots of fresh fruit and vegetables, high-quality meat and fish, healthy fats, and gluten-free grains. Due to the fact that many grains are enriched with vitamins and minerals, following a gluten-free diet may lead to certain deficiencies if dieters do not actively incorporate these nutrients in other forms. Processed and packaged gluten-free foods often contain yeast and preservatives that can be very hard on the system, and therefore, are not recommended.

**Foods to include:**

* Vegetables
* Fruits
* Gluten-free grains
* Meat
* Poultry
* Fish
* Eggs
* Beans
* Dairy
* Nuts and seeds
* Healthy oils

**Foods to avoid:**

* Barley
* Rye
* Wheat
* Spelt
* Durum flour
* Kamut
* Semolina
* Spelt
* Bulgur
* Farina
* Graham flour
* Malt
* Brewer’s yeast
* Processed foods

**Pros:**

* Drug-free cure for those with celiac
* Emphasizes whole foods
* Gluten is the only major restriction

**Cons:**

* Some followers may fall into processed foods trap
* May be difficult for some to avoid gluten
* May attract fad dieters who do not need to go gluten-free

**Sources:**

*The Gluten-Free Diet* [www.celiaccentral.org (Links to an external site.)](http://www.celiaccentral.org/)
*Gluten-Free Diet* [www.celiac.org (Links to an external site.)](http://www.celiac.org/)
*Gluten-Free Diet* [www.mayoclinic.com (Links to an external site.)](http://www.mayoclinic.com/)

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