

# Gluten: Where do we stand?

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## What is Gluten?

*Gluten is a sticky protein found in wheat, rye, barley, and some related grains.*

## Wheat & Gluten: What is all the fuss?

Facts:

- Vast majority (>93%) can consume wheat and gluten
- A few people have wheat allergies or gluten intolerances (0.5-6%)
- Obesity, diabetes, and heart disease are caused by a variety of factors and not a single food or food type

## Celiac disease.

*Affects about 3 million people in the U.S. It is an autoimmune disorder. May be passed along in families as it does have a genetic component. Damages villi of small intestine, decreasing absorption of nutrients. Symptoms vary from patient to patient. Diagnosed with blood work and confirmed with biopsy of small intestine. It is important to test BEFORE going on a gluten-free diet. Treated with a gluten-free diet helping the intestine to heal and preventing long term complications such as: lymphoma, osteoporosis, and other autoimmune conditions.*

## Non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS).

*May experience GI symptoms, but symptoms vary widely. No diagnostic tests at this time, so other conditions must be ruled out. Gluten-free diet is the basis of treatment.*

## What about a wheat allergy?

*Differs from Celiac and NCGS. Exposure brings immediate symptoms. Symptoms are often respiratory and may progress to anaphylactic shock. Need to avoid wheat- containing foods (not just gluten). Diagnosed through allergy testing.*

## What is a gluten-free diet?

*In 2013, the U.S. FDA published a regulation defining “gluten-free”. Products must contain less than 20 ppm of gluten. Label reading is key! Gluten may be hiding in unexpected places!*

## Gluten-free is not for everyone.

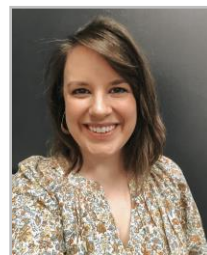
- Gluten-free substitutes can be expensive; a recent study showed an average of 162% higher, down from 242% in 2008
- Nutritionally, gluten-free can mean some nutrients are in short supply (B-vitamins, folate, and iron because most are not enriched or fortified). Most are low in fiber because they are rarely whole grain which may result in: constipation, gut and other health issues, and risk of cancer
- There is no published evidence to support a weight-loss claim

## Key Steps for a healthy (happy) gut.

*Feed your microbiome with food that promotes “good” bacteria in your gut such as prebiotics (artichokes, onions) and probiotics (sauerkraut, pickles, and yogurt). Reduce inflammation (Antioxidant/anti-inflammatory foods and other whole-grains, nuts, fatty fish or fish oil). Eat smaller meals. Increase fiber from grains, fruits, or vegetables. Healthy lifestyle: Less alcohol, no smoking, and exercise.*

## How do I manage gluten-free while away from home?

*Plan ahead, check restaurants for a gluten-free menu as well as a separate cooking space to avoid cross contact with gluten. Let your host know your dietary restrictions. Offer to bring a gluten-free dish for everyone to enjoy.*



**Grace Ostan, RN, FNP-C, DNP**

*“Be sure to consult a doctor before going gluten free, since diagnostic tests require active gluten consumption in order to be accurate. Consumers who decide to go gluten free without a diagnosis usually do not want to go back on gluten just to be tested. A gluten free diet cannot replace a formal consultation, diagnosis, or recommendation from a physician.”*