

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

Why to NOT Go Gluten-Free

With all the noise about gluten or gluten-free in the popular press these days, you'd never know there are lots of good reasons to NOT go gluten-free. But dietitians and doctors are seeing patients with unexpected effects of such a restricted diet.

Certainly there are some people who are truly allergic to gluten. They have celiac disease. Mother Nature for some reason decided that they don't get the right enzymes to digest gluten, and their bodies look at it as a foreign invader. But attacking it, their immune system attacks their own intestines. This attack leads to gas, bloating, pain, diarrhea and often malnutrition. My father knew that if he chose to eat a sandwich he would spend the rest of the day in the bathroom. Sometimes he ate it anyway! The only cure is to avoid the proteins in gluten, completely, for the rest of their lives.

On the other hand, there are thousands if not more people who have decided on their own that they'd be better off without gluten. They've believed the stars who say that gluten is bad, toxic, dangerous, the cause of all illnesses. Or they think they'll lose weight because wheat has 'too many carbs.' Unfortunately, while most do not lose weight, they may well lose other things.

When wheat is removed from a food, something else has to take its place. Most gluten-free foods are much more highly processed than what they replace. Rice and corn flours are more processed, have less fiber and are digested more rapidly. That leads to a faster rise in blood sugars than wheat flour products. If the wheat was replaced by sugar or fat, then there are more calories. That leads to weight gain.

What is often lost and not replaced when wheat flour is removed are the other nutrients. When wheat and wheat products are taken out of a diet, the levels of iron and folate go down. Both of these are necessary to make red blood cells. They are not usually replaced in gluten-free substitutes. Lots of calcium and other B vitamins are also supplied by wheat products and cereals in our diets. They're not replaced. Neither are most of the other 10 vitamins and minerals that wheat adds to our diets. Oops!

Wheat fiber and starch are some of the most common prebiotics in our diets. They help the

good bacteria in our guts survive and grow. This fiber and the bacteria that grow on it have been found to help manage the triglycerides in our blood. More fiber means lower triglycerides. The purified starches and proteins that are used in gluten-free products do not have fiber, so we have fewer good bacteria. Eating more probiotics won't help much if we don't give them the right food too.

Some people will start themselves on a completely gluten-free diet, and feel much better. They assume that they've figured out what was wrong. But they could be creating more problems. Eating completely gluten-free is not easy, and it is not cheap. So sometimes they will try a little bit of wheat-containing food. And they still feel okay. So they try a little more, and still feel okay. Pretty soon they decide that they are only 'gluten-sensitive', not really celiac, so they can eat a little bit every day. If they really do have celiac disease, that little bit of wheat could be eroding the lining of their intestines. They won't absorb the nutrients they need. Eventually they'll be deficient, and sick.

Or, if they go to the doctor for tests because they still don't feel great, there will be no way to do accurate tests for celiac. Without enough wheat in the diet to create measurable blood results, the doctor will miss the correct diagnosis. The bottom line is, if you think you might need a gluten-free diet, go to the doctor first! Get the blood tests and biopsies done. Then you'll know for sure.

Here's a fruity way to start a weekend morning. Start the night before to enjoy!

Blueberry Strata

1 (24 inch) loaf Cuban bread	3 cups fat free milk
$\frac{3}{4}$ cup packed brown sugar	6 eggs, or equivalent egg substitute
1 tsp vanilla extract	$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground cinnamon
2 cups fresh or frozen blueberries	1 cup pecans, toasted
$\frac{1}{4}$ cup brown sugar	$\frac{1}{2}$ stick (1/4 cup) margarine, melted

Cut bread into 24 slices, each 1 inch thick. Lay flat in a 9x13 inch baking pan. Beat the milk, eggs, vanilla, cinnamon and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup brown sugar together in a bowl until smooth. Pour over bread. Cover pan and refrigerate 8 hrs or overnight. To bake, preheat oven to 400° F. Remove pan from refrigerator and top with berries and pecans. (Thaw frozen blueberries first.) Sprinkle with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup brown sugar and drizzle melted margarine over it. Bake 20 to 30 min. until bubbly and brown. Serve with blueberry syrup. Serves 12.

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