



Do You Have Gluten Sensitivity?

By RoseMarie Pierce B.Sc.Pharm, Holistic Pharmacist

Many of us feel miserable soon after eating bread, pasta, sushi or even licorice. It could be because these foods contain hard-to-digest gluten proteins. Is gluten the cause of your digestive issues?

While only about 1% of our total population has Celiac Disease (a severe, gene-based auto immune/gluten intolerance disease) a far larger percentage of people have difficulty digesting gluten.

These “gluten-sensitive” individuals experience distress when eating gluten-containing products and then show improvement after following a gluten-free diet. Scientists are beginning to realize that high gluten-containing foods are not well tolerated by almost all of us!

What is Gluten?

Gluten is a group of proteins found in grass-related grains, such as wheat, rye, barley, spelt and kamut. These cereals are the basis for a variety of flour- and wheat-derived food products consumed throughout the world. For a comprehensive list of gluten-containing food products visit: <http://www.celiac.ca/index.php/about-celiac-disease/what-not-to-eat/>).

In North America, most bread, pastas, and cereals are made from high-gluten wheat; extra gluten may even be added! Interestingly, in Europe, most of their grain products contain less gluten. One explanation for this is that the wheat crops in North America have been hybridized to contain higher percentages of gluten to meet bakers' need for fluffy pastries and white bread.

What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac Disease is an autoimmune disease that requires a life-long elimination of gluten from the diet in order to heal damage done to the small intestine. As little as 10mg or a crumb of bread could cause intestinal wall damage. For these people, a gluten-free diet is the only option. In many other people, gluten can cause gastrointestinal distresses similar to those in Celiac Disease even though these symptoms may be less severe.

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What is Gluten Sensitivity?

Gluten sensitivity is an inflammatory disorder of the small intestine triggered by consuming gluten-containing foods and can lead to nutrient malabsorption and overactive immune responses. Gluten sensitivities generally worsen over time.

Enzymes Help!

Whether you choose to stay away from gluten completely, or just would like to occasionally enjoy fresh pasta or a piece of your favourite cake - there is help. Specially formulated plant-based enzymes aid in the digestion of gluten and other hard-to-digest proteins such as casein proteins - found in milk and other dairy products. Look for enzymes with Dipeptidyl Peptidase IV (DPP IV), a type of natural protease and Actazin™, a natural extract from kiwi fruit. Actazin™ contains a high level of actinidin, a protease enzyme that mimics the body's own protein-digesting enzymes. Actazin™ not only helps digest gluten, dairy and other proteins; it is highly effective for correcting the causes of constipation.

In addition to supporting gluten and casein digestion, a good enzyme formulation will include enzymes that assist in the digestion of other proteins and complex carbohydrates found in all grains. An enzyme product that contains a variety of protease (for digesting proteins) and carbohydrase (for digesting starches & complex sugars) along with the special protease know as DPPIV is most beneficial.

Just like taking a multivitamin to supplement our daily vitamin intake, taking digestive enzymes with kiwi extract supplements our body's need for enzymes.

Enzymes cannot replace a diet free of gluten for those with Celiac Disease, but they can help protect against hidden gluten and casein when eating away from home. And for those with gluten sensitivities, enzymes will make a world of difference to your digestive health!

RoseMarie Pierce, B.Sc.Pharm, earned her degree in Pharmacy from Dalhousie University in 1972. After extensive studies in herbal and nutritional medicine, RoseMarie integrated these disciplinary practices with her pharmacy education to become Canada's first Holistic Pharmacist.

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