

What is Gluten and Should I Go Gluten Free?

By Kim Maxwell

I am curious, do you know what gluten is? Not many people take the time to educate themselves and this is one topic I believe is important to understand, mainly because it is in so much of our food and it could be causing you digestive issues and other health problems (I recently read that gluten has been linked to over 55 chronic diseases). It is worth learning about in respect to your overall health and longevity.

Gluten is a protein found in many types of grains (like wheat, barley, rye) and it acts as a binder. When flour is mixed with water, the gluten proteins create a sticky, glue like consistency. This is what makes dough elastic and the ability to rise when baked. It also provides a chewy and satisfying texture (which is why it has been added to many foods, to enhance the texture so consumers will buy more and more of it).

Most of us relate gluten to bread but did you know it is also added to sauces, soups, dressings, ketchup, beer, etc. to create that satisfying texture that I described above.

So what is the problem with gluten? My aim is to not demonize gluten but to make you aware of some of the common issues related to gluten so you can decide for yourself.

The biggest problem I see with gluten is that we over consume it. We are overwhelming our body with something that is nutrient poor and eventually wreaks havoc on our system. The most common complaint I get in my practice is feeling bloated and brain fog. I immediately think of gluten because it is one of the most common inflammatory foods. So many of us are sensitive to it (others, like celiacs, are allergic to it but that is a whole other topic).

If you deal with bloating, gas, digestive distress, depression, acne, brain fog (these are just a few symptoms), you may want to consider eliminating gluten. My recommendation is at least 2 weeks but ideally 4 weeks to give your body time to adapt to life without gluten and see how you feel. After that time, reintroduce gluten and observe what shows up. It is most likely going to be an eye opener for you! I can honestly say that the clients I have coached through a gluten free diet for 3-4 weeks feel a whole lot better, report less gut distress, and are more focused at work.

I do need to point out that for some, it may not have been the gluten that was causing them all the symptoms. It may have been the food that contained the gluten that was full of junk like sugar, another common inflammatory food. Remember gluten and sugar show up in almost all processed foods and that is what the majority of us eat on a regular basis. No matter what, in the end, they felt better without those gluten containing foods and that is what matters. They decreased the inflammation in their body and their body was thanking them for giving it a break!

Do not fall into the gluten free marketing trap at the grocery store! You will pay more because the packaging says gluten free but you are not getting a health food. They take the gluten out but pack in the sugar (remember, sugar is inflammatory too)! You have to read the label. Never believe the front of the box, turn it over and read the ingredients. My advice, search out REAL foods, stick to vegetables, fruits, proteins, and healthy fats for as much of your daily diet as possible.

The bottom line, gluten free is an important pathway to better overall health. I am all for an occasional fun night out. I believe food is such an important part of relationships and connection however, we eat too much and that is where the problem lies. We all can benefit from less of the processed foods and more of the REAL foods.

If you ever feel like you could use some help navigating your diet and healthy food choices, please don't hesitate to contact me for a free 30 minute consult. In a nutshell, I do one-on-one as well as group coaching, meal planning, pantry clean outs, grocery store tours, and meal prep parties. My goal is to take the overwhelm off your plate any way I can. Contact me at kmaxfit@gmail.com.