



These days, we hear a lot about gluten in the news, on social media, and even on restaurant menus. But what is it, exactly, and why is it important? Here, we discuss the difference between gluten sensitivity and celiac disease, identify conditions and possible treatments.

Gluten-related conditions: Which is it?



There's so much conflicting information available on gluten-related conditions that it's hard to know where to start. Here are some quick definitions:

Gluten: Gluten is a general name for the proteins found in wheat and other grains like barley and rye. Gluten helps food maintain its shape, acting as a glue that holds food together. Because of this quality, gluten can be found in many types of foods, even ones that would not be expected.

Celiac disease: Celiac disease (gluten-sensitive enteropathy) is an immune reaction (autoimmune disease) to eating gluten. In people with celiac disease, eating gluten triggers an immune response in your small intestine. Over time, this reaction damages your small intestine's lining and prevents absorption of some nutrients (malabsorption). It's thought that about 1 in 133 people have celiac disease, but as many as 85% of them are undiagnosed.

Symptoms: The most common signs for adults are diarrhea, fatigue and weight loss. Adults may also experience bloating and gas, abdominal pain, nausea, constipation, and vomiting. Non-digestive symptoms include anemia, osteoporosis, itchy and blistering skin rash (dermatitis herpetiformis), headaches and fatigue, and joint pain.

Wheat allergy: Like other food allergies, this is the result of the immune system mistaking gluten or some other protein found in wheat as a disease-causing agent, such as a virus or bacteria. The immune system creates an antibody to the protein, prompting an immune system response similar to other allergic reactions.

Symptoms: Congestion, breathing difficulties, swelling, itching or irritation of the mouth or throat, hives, headache, digestive symptoms like nausea or diarrhea, and anaphylaxis.

Gluten sensitivity: This condition is very similar in its symptoms to celiac disease, but is not an autoimmune disease. It is generally diagnosed if a celiac disease test is negative and symptoms go away when the patient follows a gluten free diet. Gluten sensitivity varies in severity, but doesn't generally cause the damage to the small intestine common with celiac disease.

Symptoms: Abdominal pain, bloating, diarrhea, "foggy mind," depression, ADHD-like behavior, constipation, headaches, bone or joint pain, and chronic fatigue.

It's important to note that these conditions are very similar, but don't always have the same treatments. A doctor and medical screenings MUST be involved for a proper diagnosis.

Adapted from celiac.org and Mayo Clinic

Gluten in medications

If you are cutting gluten from your diet, you may want to check your prescription or over-the-counter (non-prescription) medications. The chances of getting a medication that contains gluten is extremely small, but you may want to search the ingredients of your medications to be sure. Oral medications in the form of tablets and capsules are a potential source of gluten contamination. These ingredients, also known as excipients, include the active medication as well as additions to allow the medication to be absorbed in your body appropriately. Excipients can be synthetic or from natural sources derived from either plants or animals. Excipients are considered inactive and safe for human use by the FDA, but can be a potential source for unwanted reactions.

When determining if a medication is gluten free, you will want to search the list of excipients for starch. You can also call the drug manufacturer, though often they will not guarantee a product as gluten free. If you're unsure, share your concerns with your pharmacist; they may be able to identify possible risks and work with your doctor to find an alternative.

Adapted from celiac.org



Adopting a Gluten-Free Diet

Although there are a lot of naturally gluten-free foods, not to mention a growing number of gluten-free alternatives, one of the hardest parts of adopting a gluten-free diet is knowing which foods are safe. Gluten is in a lot of things that we wouldn't expect. For this reason, it's extremely important to discuss the change to a gluten free diet with a doctor and/or nutritionist beforehand.

Following a gluten-free diet requires paying careful attention to both the ingredients of foods and their nutritional content.

Allowed fresh foods

Many naturally gluten-free foods can be a part of a healthy diet:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Unprocessed beans, seeds and nuts
- Eggs
- Lean, unprocessed meat and fish
- Most low-fat dairy products

The biggest items to avoid are foods that contain wheat, barley, and grain. Fortunately, there are a lot of alternatives that naturally do not contain gluten. Some examples of grains, starches or flours that you can include in a gluten-free diet are:

- Buckwheat
- Corn and cornmeal
- Flax
- Quinoa
- Rice
- Soy
- Tapioca (cassava root)

Note: While oats are naturally gluten-free, they may be contaminated during production with wheat, barley or rye. Oats and oat products labeled gluten-free have not been cross-contaminated. Some people with celiac disease, however, cannot tolerate the gluten-free labeled oats.

Gluten-free food labels

When you are buying processed foods, you need to read labels to determine if they contain gluten. Foods that contain wheat, barley, rye or triticale — or an ingredient

derived from them — must be labeled with the name of the grain in the label's content list. Foods that are labeled gluten-free, according to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) rules, must have fewer than 20 parts per million of gluten.

Processed foods often contain gluten

A lot of people run into trouble with foods that they don't expect to contain gluten, but in fact use it when the foods are processed. Wheat or wheat gluten is often added to processed foods as a thickening or binding agent, flavoring, or coloring. It's important to read labels of processed foods to determine if they contain wheat, as well as barley and rye.

Some common foods you might not expect to have gluten, but often do, are:

- Candies
- Gravies
- Imitation meat or seafood
- Matzo
- Hot dogs and processed lunch meats
- Salad dressings
- Sauces, including soy sauce
- Seasoned snack foods, such as chips
- Soups, bouillon or soup mixes
- Vegetables in sauce

The results of a gluten-free diet are one area in which the diagnoses of celiac disease and gluten sensitivity differ. Keeping a strict gluten-free diet is a lifelong necessity for people with celiac disease. Following the diet and avoiding cross-contamination results in fewer symptoms and complications of the disease.

But for some people with non-celiac gluten sensitivity, the condition may not be lifelong. Some research suggests that you may follow the diet for a certain period, such as one or two years, and then retest your sensitivity to gluten. Some people have been able to slowly add some gluten back into their diets. For other people with non-celiac gluten sensitivity, the diet may be a lifelong treatment.

Adapted from [Mayo Clinic](#)



Recipe of the Month:

Gluten-Free 3-Ingredient Banana Pancakes

Here is a quick, easy, flourless and low-calorie breakfast in a snap. For this 3-ingredient recipe, you will need only banana, eggs, and baking powder. But, make sure to only use ripe bananas for this recipe. Enjoy!

Ingredients

1½ large bananas, ripe to overripe
2 eggs
⅛ teaspoon baking powder
Maple syrup or blueberries, to serve

Instructions

In a mixing bowl, add the eggs and baking powder. Whisk to combine.

In another bowl, lightly mash 1½ large, ripe bananas with a potato masher or a fork. You'll want chunks of bananas for fluffy pancakes. Pour the egg mixture into the mashed bananas and stir to combine.

In a frying pan, cook mini pancakes over a medium low heat. 1 or 2 tablespoons of batter is enough for each pancake. When the baking powder is activated, flip the pancake over and cook for one minute more. Serve immediately.

Nutrition per serving (serves 1):

Calories: 284; Fat: 9.3 g; Saturated Fat: 2.9 g; Cholesterol: 327 mg; Fiber: 4.6 g; Carbohydrates: 41.4 g; Protein: 13 g; Sodium: 126 mg

Adapted from [Eugenie Kitchen](#)