

# Gut Health: Gluten



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# Welcome

Unless you have been living under a rock, you have undoubtedly seen or heard many people saying they are reducing their gluten or giving it up altogether for health benefits. In some cases, people actually have allergies or an intolerance. Coeliac Disease is an autoimmune disease where the body's immune response to gluten causes inflammation and damage to the small intestine. Others may have a sensitivity to gluten, which largely mirrors the same symptoms as an intolerance but without the immune response and resultant damage. The latter is more common, so that is what we are going to explore further

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# WHAT IS gluten?



Gluten is a type of protein that is found in a variety of different grains. Many people think about wheat as being gluten, but it can also be found in rye, and barley, with cross contamination to oats if they've been grown alongside other grains.

The gluten protein is made up of other proteins, including glutenin and gliadin. These are often more closely linked to people who experience negative reactions in the form of a gluten allergy or Coeliac disease, which is an autoimmune condition of the small intestine.

In response to consuming gluten, the body's immune response is triggered, causing damage to the lining of the gut, and resulting in poor or absent absorption of food nutrients. It's a very serious disease, and one which I am familiar with as both my Mum and best friend have diagnosed Coeliac Disease. The symptoms are slightly different when comparing it to an intolerance or sensitivity to gluten as opposed to actually being allergic to it.



## COMMON SYMPTOMS OF

# gluten intolerance

When you have an intolerance to gluten, your GI symptoms can range from mild to severe with abdominal discomfort and pain often being present, and being misdiagnosed as Irritable Bowel Syndrome.

You might find that you have abdominal discomfort or indigestion when you consume foods with a lot of wheat or rye (beer, ale, breads, cakes and biscuits, crumpets, pasta). You may eat a simple sandwich and suddenly find that your stomach is hurting and you might experience diarrhoea, bloating, constipation or nausea. In more severe cases you may be troubled by fatigue, and tiredness, which are present in up to 82% of people with gluten intolerance.

Other common symptoms include headaches, anaemia, tiredness, fatigue, muscle and joint aches, mouth ulcers, tooth decay and/or weight loss

# less common signs of gluten intolerance

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## **SKIN CONDITIONS**

Itchy rashes including red splotches on the face and excessive dandruff might actually be due to gluten intolerance. While these conditions can be worse if you actually have an allergy to gluten, people with intolerance or sensitivity may also experience similar symptoms. These are also common signs of eczema, which is more prevalent in people with gluten issues.

## **MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS**

If you struggle with anxiety and/or depression, it may well be linked to gluten intolerance and sensitivity. There have been a number of studies which have found correlation between gluten intolerances and mental health. Like skin conditions, symptoms may be worse in Coeliac Disease, but that doesn't mean existing anxiety or depression can't also worsen if you have an intolerance to gluten. If you have noticed extreme irritability at odd times, worsening low mood, or sudden onset anxiety, palpitations, agitation or ADHD symptoms, it might be a good time to consider the presence of other symptoms of gluten sensitivity.

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## **BRAIN FOG**

An inability to concentrate as well as lethargy, and headaches has been linked to the malabsorption of nutrients in people with gluten sensitivity and intolerance, plus the antibodies produced in response to gluten compound the scenario, leading to a fuzzy head or feeling spacey.



# lifestyle changes

If you are found to have a gluten sensitivity, as opposed to an intolerance or allergy, you don't have to completely give up all gluten, but you do need to decrease in order to lessen your symptoms. The more foods you eat containing gluten, the worse you are going to end up feeling. They might not cause serious illness as in the case of Coeliac Disease, but gluten can definitely make you feel unwell.

If you want stomach aches and migraines to go away, stay away from foods with wheat, rye, or barley. This includes most breads, grains, pasta, beer and ale, and a wide range of packaged and processed foods. You should try to stick to a diet consisting primarily of fruits, vegetables, and lean protein like meat. Wholefoods are ideal



## take note

You likely know that having digestion issues is very common when you have an intolerance to gluten, and this can lead to leaky gut and/or lower immunity as a result of changes to the gut microbiome. If you're unsure, elimination and reintroduction is key. Try eating a gluten-free diet for a short period of time and see if your digestion and symptoms improve. If they do, the indication is an issue with gluten. Any time you have an odd or new onset symptom, you should talk to your doctor about it. They might find that some of your symptoms are due to what you eat, or it may be something completely different. Removing gluten for a few days can tell you a lot about how you feel before and after. Keep notes so that you can accurately report any changes in symptoms.