HEALTH & WELLNESS CORNER

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Gluten-Free: What You Need to Know

Gluten-free diets are increasingly popular, whether as a personal choice or a necessity for those who suffer from celiac disease or gluten sensitivity. Over 50 percent of Americans believe products that say "gluten-free" on the label have been verified to be free from all gluten. In fact, the only way to be sure of verification is to look for a gluten-free certification mark!

Gluten Intolerance or Sensitivity

The most severe type of gluten intolerance is celiac disease, an autoimmune disease and genetic disorder which affects roughly one percent of the American population. However, it's estimated that gluten sensitivities affect a much larger portion of the population. In fact, the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness estimates that as many as 18 million Americans may have some form of gluten sensitivity - a condition that affects the intestines and immune system when gluten is consumed. Here are a few things to keep in mind if you suffer from gluten intolerance or sensitivity:

- **Take additional caution with processed foods** | t is more difficult to identify gluten in foods that are mixed and processed. Looking on manufacturer's website or calling its customer service line could help you uncover hidden gluten before purchasing.
- **Consumers are unclear about gluten in processed goods** | About half (48%) of consumers do not realize gluten can be found in either spices/flavorings or dietary supplements.
- **Be an informed diner** | Restaurants are jumping on the gluten-free craze, but just because a menu item says gluten-free doesn't mean it is. One-third (33 percent) of consumers incorrectly believe the government regulates claims made on restaurant and bakery menus. It is important to ask what is in the food and where and how the food is prepared. This can help you to avoid hidden gluten as a result of cross-contamination during the food preparation process.

Look for Third-Party Certifications

Consumers can only be certain that products are truly gluten-free if the product has been tested and certified by a third party. NSF International gluten-free certification assures consumers that the product does not contain gluten over the FDA's allowable limit of 20 parts per million (ppm) and that it is manufactured in a facility that prevents cross-contamination.

Ways to Avoid Gluten.

Going gluten-free can feel difficult, especially at first, but it doesn't have to be that way. If you were diagnosed with celiac disease or gluten intolerance or gluten sensitivity, chances are you'll learn to look for the obvious sources of gluten, such as breads and cereals. But gluten also lurks in some hard-to-find places. Our expert tips help you track it down and avoid it, and help you feel good about what you can eat.

- Check Your Meds for Gluten
- Be Aware of What Wheat "Meets"
- Dig In to Other Whole Grain
- Scout Out Sources of Gluten on Labels

Gluten-Free Substitutes

Rice is extremely versatile in its own right, and can often replace unsafe pasta, bread or noodles in recipes.

Corn is also versatile. Cooked corn meal, called by a variety of names (polenta, mush, Indian pudding, grits) is always welcome.

Plain Rice Cakes (puffed) are fun replacements for bread