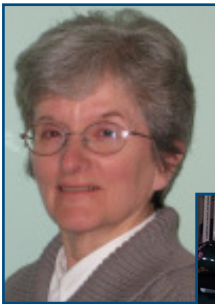


The Gluten-Free Market

by Susan Lockhart, PhD and Maria Rivera-Trudeau, MBA¹



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If you have been to a grocery store recently, you have seen a growing number of products labeled “gluten free.” Gluten-free product sales reached more than \$2.6 billion by the end of 2010 and are expected to exceed more than \$5 billion by 2015.²

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye and barley and foods made from these grains. When people with celiac disease (an autoimmune disorder) eat foods containing gluten, their immune system responds by damaging the lining of the small intestine. The body is then unable to absorb nutrients into the bloodstream, which can lead to malnourishment. Left untreated, people with celiac disease can develop further complications such as other autoimmune diseases, osteoporosis and cancer. Adherence to a gluten-free diet is not a fad for these people; it is a medical necessity.

Celiac disease was once considered rare in the US, but recent research has shown it occurs in 1 in 133 Americans, affecting more than three million people or about one percent of the US population.³ Approximately 18 million people (six percent of the US population) suffer from gluten sensitivity. This group reacts to gluten with some of the same symptoms as people with celiac disease, but gluten-sensitive individuals typically test negative for celiac disease in diagnostic blood tests and show no signs of the damage to the small intestine that defines celiac disease.³

Celiac disease and gluten sensitivity may occur at any age, even in the elderly. Some researchers estimate that more than 30 percent of patients with newly diagnosed celiac disease are older than 60 years.^{4,5} Some of these older adults may be developing celiac disease later in life, or the disease may have gone undetected in their younger years. Improvements in serological testing are contributing to the larger number of diagnoses in the elderly. Physicians are being encouraged to test elderly patients for celiac disease, especially if these patients have unresolved symptoms or family members with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity.

An estimated 95 percent of Americans with celiac disease are undiagnosed or misdiagnosed,³ but education and testing are improving. Several national professional and voluntary organizations and the National Institutes of Health have awareness campaigns targeting healthcare providers and the general public. The campaigns offer current, science-based information about celiac disease and gluten sensitivity. Multiple organizations also have training programs for healthcare and hospital-based food industry employees on how to provide a gluten-free environment for patients with gluten problems.

¹Authors of www.live2bg glutenfree.com

²Source: *Packaged Facts*, 2011.

³Source: *University of Maryland Center for Celiac Research*, 2003, 2011.

⁴Source: *Johnson M.W. et. al., Gastroenterology and Hepatology*, 2008.

⁵Source: *University of Maryland Center for Celiac Research*, 2011.

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(continued)

Patients who are gluten free know their health can be seriously compromised by exposure to gluten within a healthcare setting. When choosing a hospital, they are more likely to select a facility that has staff trained to help them avoid gluten from food, medications or other sources within the hospital.

For more information on living gluten free, recipes and resources visit www.live2bglutenfree.com.

The authors are health professionals who are now retired from careers in Federal service. They were both diagnosed with gluten intolerance as adults. They started their website and blog to help other adults who are newly diagnosed with gluten intolerance or celiac disease adopt and maintain gluten-free lifestyles.