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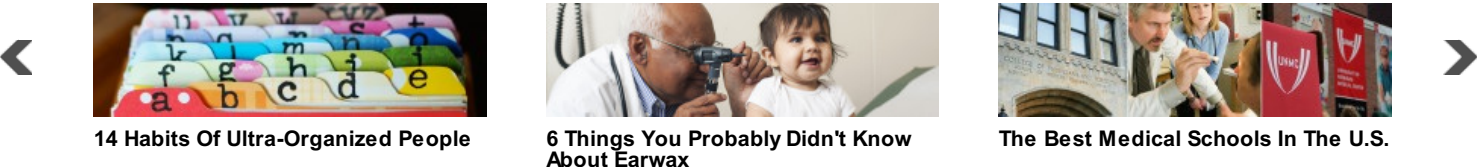
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Practicing physician

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## Gluten: What You Don't Know Might Kill You

Posted: 01/02/10 12:00 PM ET

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Something you're eating may be killing you, and you probably don't even know it!

If you eat cheeseburgers or French fries all the time or drink six sodas a day, you likely know you are shortening your life. But eating a nice dark, crunchy slice of whole wheat bread--how could that be bad for you?

Well, bread contains **gluten**, a protein found in wheat, barley, rye, spelt, kamut, and oats. It is hidden in pizza, pasta, bread, wraps, rolls, and most processed foods. Clearly, gluten is a staple of the American diet.

What most people don't know is that gluten can cause serious health complications for many. You may be at risk even if you don't have full blown celiac disease.

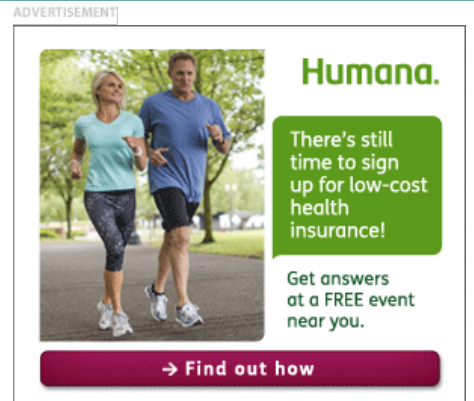
In today's blog I want to reveal the truth about gluten, explain the dangers, and provide you with a simple system that will help you determine whether or not gluten is a problem for you.

### The Dangers of Gluten

A recent large study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that people with diagnosed, undiagnosed, and "latent" celiac disease or gluten sensitivity had a higher risk of death, mostly from heart disease and cancer. (1)

This study looked at almost 30,00 patients from 1969 to 2008 and examined deaths in three groups: Those with full-blown celiac disease, those with inflammation of their intestine but

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not full-blown celiac disease, and those with latent celiac disease or gluten sensitivity (elevated gluten antibodies but negative intestinal biopsy).

The findings were dramatic. There was a 39 percent increased risk of death in those with celiac disease, 72 percent increased risk in those with gut inflammation related to gluten, and 35 percent increased risk in those with gluten sensitivity but no celiac disease.

This is ground-breaking research that proves you don't have to have full-blown celiac disease with a positive intestinal biopsy (which is what conventional thinking tells us) to have serious health problems and complications--even death--from eating gluten.

Yet an estimated 99 percent of people who have a problem with eating gluten don't even know it. They ascribe their ill health or symptoms to something else--not gluten sensitivity, which is 100 percent curable.

And here's some more shocking news ...

Another study comparing the blood of 10,000 people from 50 years ago to 10,000 people today found that the incidences of full-blown celiac disease increased by 400 percent (elevated TTG antibodies) during that time period. (ii) If we saw a 400 percent increase in heart disease or cancer, this would be headline news. But we hear almost nothing about this. I will explain why I think that increase has occurred in a moment. First, let's explore the economic cost of this hidden epidemic.

Undiagnosed gluten problems cost the American healthcare system oodles of money. Dr. Peter Green, Professor of Clinical Medicine for the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University studied all 10 million subscribers to CIGNA and found those who were correctly diagnosed with celiac disease used fewer medical services and reduced their healthcare costs by more than 30 percent. (iii) The problem is that only one percent of those with the problem were actually diagnosed. That means 99 percent are walking around suffering without knowing it, costing the healthcare system millions of dollars.

And it's not just a few who suffer, but millions. Far more people have gluten sensitivity than you think--especially those who are chronically ill. The most serious form of allergy to gluten, celiac disease, affects one in 100 people, or three million Americans, most of who don't know they have it. But milder forms of gluten sensitivity are even more common and may affect up to one-third of the American population.

Why haven't you heard much about this?

Well, actually you have, but you just don't realize it. Celiac disease and gluten sensitivity masquerade as dozens and dozens of other diseases with different names.

### Gluten Sensitivity: One Cause, Many Diseases

A review paper in *The New England Journal of Medicine* listed 55 "diseases" that can be caused by eating gluten. (iv) These include osteoporosis, irritable bowel disease, inflammatory bowel disease, anemia, cancer, fatigue, canker sores, (v) and rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, multiple sclerosis, and almost all other autoimmune diseases. Gluten is also linked to many psychiatric (vi) and neurological diseases, including anxiety, depression, (vii) schizophrenia, (viii) dementia, (ix) migraines, epilepsy, and neuropathy (nerve damage). (x) It has also been linked to autism.(ix)

We used to think that gluten problems or celiac disease were confined to children who had diarrhea, weight loss, and failure to thrive. Now we know you can be old, fat, and constipated and still have celiac disease or gluten sensitivity.

Gluten sensitivity is actually an autoimmune disease that creates inflammation throughout the body, with wide-ranging effects across all organ systems including your brain, heart, joints, digestive tract, and more. It can be the single cause behind many different "diseases." To correct these diseases, you need to treat the cause--which is often gluten sensitivity--not just the symptoms.

Of course, that doesn't mean that ALL cases of depression or autoimmune disease or any of these other problems are caused by gluten in everyone--but it is important to look for it if you have any chronic illness.

By failing to identify gluten sensitivity and celiac disease, we create needless suffering and death for millions of Americans. Health problems caused by gluten sensitivity cannot be treated with better medication. They can only be resolved by eliminating 100 percent of the gluten from your diet.

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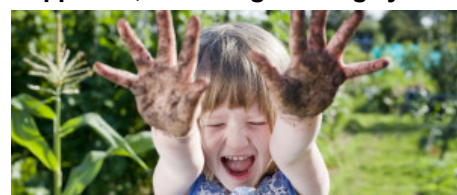
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The question that remains is: Why are we so sensitive to this "staff of life," the staple of our diet?

There are many reasons ...

They include our lack of genetic adaptation to grasses, and particularly gluten, in our diet. Wheat was introduced into Europe during the Middle Ages, and 30 percent of people of European descent carry the gene for celiac disease (HLA DQ2 or HLA DQ8), (xii) which increases susceptibility to health problems from eating gluten.

American strains of wheat have a much higher gluten content (which is needed to make light, fluffy Wonder Bread and giant bagels) than those traditionally found in Europe. This super-gluten was recently introduced into our agricultural food supply and now has "infected" nearly all wheat strains in America.

To find out if you are one of the millions of people suffering from an unidentified gluten sensitivity, just follow this simple procedure.

### **The Elimination/Reintegration Diet**

While testing can help identify gluten sensitivity, the only way you will know if this is really a problem for you is to eliminate all gluten for a short period of time (2 to 4 weeks) and see how you feel. Get rid of the following foods:

- Gluten (barley, rye, oats, spelt, kamut, wheat, triticale--see [www.celiac.com](http://www.celiac.com) for a complete list of foods that contain gluten, as well as often surprising and hidden sources of gluten.)
- Hidden sources (soup mixes, salad dressings, sauces, as well as lipstick, certain vitamins, medications, stamps and envelopes you have to lick, and even Play-Doh.)

For this test to work you MUST eliminate 100 percent of the gluten from your diet--no exceptions, no hidden gluten, and not a single crumb of bread.

Then eat it again and see what happens. If you feel bad at all, you need to stay off gluten permanently. This will teach you better than any test about the impact gluten has on your body.

But if you are still interested in testing, here are some things to keep in mind.

### **Testing for Gluten Sensitivity or Celiac Disease**

There are gluten allergy/ceciac disease tests that are available through Labcorp or Quest Diagnostics. All these tests help identify various forms of allergy or sensitivity to gluten or wheat. They will look for:

- IgA anti-gliadin antibodies
- IgG anti-gliadin antibodies
- IgA anti-endomysial antibodies
- Tissue transglutaminase antibody (IgA and IgG in questionable cases)
- Total IgA antibodies
- HLA DQ2 and DQ8 genotyping for celiac disease (used occasionally to detect genetic susceptibility).
- Intestinal biopsy (rarely needed if gluten antibodies are positive--based on my interpretation of the recent study)

When you get these tests, there are a few things to keep in mind.

In light of the new research on the dangers of gluten sensitivity without full blown celiac disease, I consider any elevation of antibodies significant and worthy of a trial of gluten elimination. Many doctors consider elevated anti-gliadin antibodies in the absence of a positive intestinal biopsy showing damage to be "false positives." That means the test looks positive but really isn't significant.

We can no longer say that. Positive is positive and, as with all illness, there is a continuum of disease, from mild gluten sensitivity to full-blown celiac disease. If your antibodies are elevated, you should go off gluten and test to see if it is leading to your health problems.

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So now you see--that piece of bread may not be so wholesome after all! Follow the advice I've shared with you today to find out if gluten may be the hidden cause of your health problems. Simply eliminating this insidious substance from your diet, may help you [achieve lifelong vibrant health](#).

That's all for today. Now I'd like to hear from you ...

Are you one of the millions that have been lead to believe gluten is perfectly safe to eat?

How do foods that contain gluten seem to affect you?

What tips can you share with others about eliminating gluten from your diet?

Please let me know your thoughts by posting a comment below.

To your good health,

Mark Hyman, MD

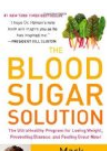
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*Mark Hyman, M.D. practicing physician and founder of The UltraWellness Center is a pioneer in functional medicine. Dr. Hyman is now sharing the 7 ways to tap into your body's natural ability to heal itself. You can follow him on [Twitter](#), connect with him on [LinkedIn](#), watch his videos on [Youtube](#) and become a fan on [Facebook](#).*

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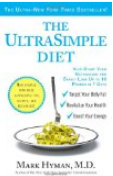


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**boxengo**  
0 Fans ♥

Several factual issues with this article that Huffpo should be concerned about. 1) Wheat and other high gluten cereals have been found in many forms since prehistoric times in Europe (3000 BC). 2) The JAMA article cited by the author is not considered strong evidence in the medical world. Notably, many individuals with celiac disease or sensitivity without biopsies would never have had their health outcomes figured into the analysis, and the effect seen may well disappear. More importantly, just think from an evolutionary perspective: if this were such an important disease, there would be a decimated and small Indo-European population, which is not the case. Gluten played a major role in Indo-European people's survival, and those that had serious disease from wheat allergies, like Asians with rice allergies, would not have passed their genes down. Period. This is just another example of the haves enjoying their ability to worry. If people simply ate better in general and exercised, the health benefits from that would outweigh those gained from combating any putative widespread celiac disease, but it would not make for sexy and saleable "advice".

3 JAN 2010 1:13 AM

★ FAVE ✎ SHARE ⋮ MORE



**TakeSake**

464 Fans ♥ · The United States for All Americans

1) There is a difference between allergies and intolerance. In my case, it's intolerance.

2) Wheat is grown differently today than it was from 10,000 to 50 years ago. Since then herbicides, pesticides, fertilizers, and hybridization have changed it.

3) Gluten is the fuel for the fire. Perhaps the spark was something else - I don't know. Start by cutting out the fuel. If you don't get burned by gluten, well all the more power to you. It effects me and others.

4) I can turn problems on and off like a switch based on (for me) wheat and dairy. That pie I got into a couple days ago? The canker sores will go away in a couple days. Like clockwork. Predictable. Tested. Period.

3 JAN 2010 1:31 AM

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11 PEOPLE IN THE CONVERSATION

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**AmyJane**

1 Fan ♥

★ 4

Thank you! I tested positive for gluten intolerance 4 weeks ago. I think I've had it 15-20 years. Main symptoms have been slow but steady stubborn weight gain, fatigue, joint and muscle pain, and a pain in my upper middle back for the last 5 years. I had x-rays and ultrasounds for that, never found anything. I knew I had a problem with wheat but didn't know enough about gluten to make the connection. I also tested IgG positive for 50 foods, all of which I think I will be able to eat again when I have healed. Gluten, NO--never again. I'm not even tempted. I noticed a huge improvement in 3 days. I ate gluten twice after that, once knowingly, the other not, and noticed an immediate return of symptoms. My joint pain is almost completely gone, the pain in the back is gone, I have lots of energy and I have lost 10 pounds without trying. It's an easy blood test, or just try the elimination diet. It is AMAZING the difference it can make if you are intolerant. Very disappointing that I'll probably have to pay for the dr. visit and blood tests. I know the insurance companies have paid thousands over the last 15 years for all the attempts to find out what was wrong.

8 JAN 2010 6:53 PM

★ FAVE ✎ SHARE ⋮ MORE



**TakeSake**

464 Fans ♥ · The United States for All Americans

★ 1

I figured it out 6 years ago. Now I realize that was sensitive to it for 15 or 20 years before that. Once I changed my diet, many of those various rashes and ailments that I got used to faded away.

9 JAN 2010 1:54 AM

★ FAVE ✎ SHARE ⋮ MORE



**sampson1410**

0 Fans ♥

★ 5

Thank you for this article, it confirms what I have thought for years. I had three stents installed when I was 45 years old due to a 95% blockage of my artery. I have always worked out and watched what I ate so my near death experience was a total shock. After my surgery I became very weak and was dropping weight although I was eating three squares a day. My bad cholesterol was getting worse and my good was dropping alarmingly low (29). I was diagnosed with celiacs disease three years later. I am 6'6" tall and was down to 196 pounds, I looked like a walking skeleton. After removing gluten from my diet I gained 32 pounds the first year and my energy has shot through the roof.

My bad cholesterol has gone down and my good is continuing to climb (59). Amazing how your diet can affect your life. My only question is why did my reaction to gluten become so bad after my heart surgery?

2 MAR 2010 4:28 PM

★ FAVE ↻ SHARE \*\*\* MORE



**Imaginelife**

0 Fans ♥

★ 4

Nonsense... The entire Gluten thing is total BS. It's nothing more than the failed Atkin's folks and Carb-free industry pushing the same nonsense to us in a different package. Back in the 1950's they called it the all-meat diet, then it was the Atkin's carb-free diet, and now it's the gluten-free diet.... and it's all based on bad science. NO ONE IS ALLERGIC TO GLUTEN. They never have been not will they ever. Its probably one of the healthiest things you could ever eat.

And just for proof, scientists still can't prove the peanut-allergy! Were the only country in the world that even has "peanut allergys" to begin with.

It's complete nonsense that peanuts or gluten are causing a toxic bio-chemical reaction in anyone. If it did, they would be able to identify the chemical. They can't, and double-blind studies prove it.

2 JAN 2010 7:15 PM

★ FAVE ↻ SHARE \*\*\* MORE



**ObamaYouBetcha**

SUPER USER · 319 Fans ♥ · Never runs with scissors.

So my friend's kids - the ones that have been to the emergency room several times with anaphylactic shock because of peanuts - shouldn't worry about it?

2 JAN 2010 7:25 PM

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9 PEOPLE IN THE CONVERSATION

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**Richard\_Gorelick**

90 Fans ♥

The author's recommended diagnostic diet is too hard for most people to try in that it demands not only 100% fidelity but a steep learning curve and financial commitment before even being undertaken. I truly think I probably have some problems with celiac but I'm not gonna do that two-week NOT EVEN A CRUMB thing.

The author, if he really wants people to investigate this, should propose a more doable diagnostic.

4 JAN 2010 4:14 PM

★ FAVE ↻ SHARE \*\*\* MORE



**SadieNardini**

485 Fans ♥ · Yoga & Fierce Living Expert

★ 2

So, Richard, if it's a question of being 72% more likely to develop heart disease, or cancer, you couldn't refrain from eating that bagel? Really? If you are Celiac or intolerant, you'd be best served to cut it out anyway, so why not start learning how? I'd rather stop eating pizza than have a doctor biopsy my intestinal WALL. Ew!

Anyway--I did the removal diet, even though I'm Italian and my diet depended on bread -- and it was incredible.

After years of feeling abdominal pain almost every time I ate, I found out about gluten. I did remove it from my diet for a month, as it occurred to me that this would be the best way to tell if I had a problem with the gluten, or something else.

This is not as hard as it seems--stick to fruits, veggies, natural meats, beans, and healthy fats--a great diet any way you slice it, and you'll be fine.

When I tried to re-introduce gluten, I spent 8 hours in bad intestinal distress--and I knew for sure, that, like my mother who has the same symptoms, if we wanted to choose health, we'd have to skip the Wheaties for a lifetime.

I feel none of the pain or discomfort I used to, even after having multiple docs tell me I had Irritable Bowel Syndrome. Um, yeah...from the gluten I was eating!

Kudos, Dr. Hyman...it's good to see some doctors see the whole picture.

4 JAN 2010 4:45 PM

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10 PEOPLE IN THE CONVERSATION

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**BlazeKING**

303 Fans ♥ · Between two evils, I choose neither

★ 2

No one should eat grains anyways unless they are third world and starving. They are a cheap and inefficient food source.

Every diabetic and fat/obese person I know is or was a compulsive grain eater. I always recommend a paleo diet. And not listening to my doctor was probably the best thing I could do for my health. There are so many conventional wisdom doctors out there its crazy. I never trust them. It's almost like they want us sick and on drugs because then we will be return customers.

5 JAN 2010 12:58 AM

★ FAVE ◀ SHARE \*\*\* MORE



**hazyjane**

4 Fans ♥

★ 1

I so agree! Nutritional anthropologists believe that humans have not been eating grains for long enough to have fully adapted to them.

I now eat a modified Paleo diet (Primal).

When I stopped eating grains (which I was sure was going to be hard but turned out so much easier that I imagined!) I found it easier to finally lose belly fat, my mind was SO much more clear and my skin cleared up significantly! I also finally started making progress on healing my burned out adrenals.

I had been primarily vegetarian for 16 years before that (read: lots of "healthy" grains) but now I feel I was working against my body's better interest.

If anyone wants to learn more about nutritional anthropology, I recommend the following books:

"Primal Body, Primal Mind" by Nora Gegaudas and "The Primal Blueprint" by Mark Sisson

5 JAN 2010 2:28 PM

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5 PEOPLE IN THE CONVERSATION

Read Conversation →



**defiance777**

SUPER USER · 107 Fans ♥

★ 4

Thanks for the wonderful article. I try telling my family about gluten but no one seems to believe how bad it can be for you. For the most part, people are unwilling to admit that something so simple can lead to so many health problems. As someone posted above, everything that has gluten in it "tastes good", and I feel like the typical American would rather take medicine for disease than to stop eating what they like. Bummer.

5 JAN 2010 8:58 AM

★ FAVE ◀ SHARE \*\*\* MORE





**Jan M.** (yogajan)

1,751 Fans · Hell is other people

★ 1

Gluten intolerance -- the latest designer disease for neurotic people. If you feel better by not eating gluten, then don't eat it. Designer disease=new ways for businesses to make money off of bad science. The people who really have a diagnosis of celiac disease are the ones who benefit from a gluten free diet. For the rest of you, listen to your body and be very skeptical of every new disease/cure/rule that comes around. If you can't grasp this, do some research into the bottled water industry in the US. Not only is bottled water not necessary, it has been found to be no better than tap water (in most parts of the country), plastic bottles are not biodegradable, but more important look at who has made the money off of bottled water--COCA COLA. We have been duped again by big business.

3 JAN 2010 3:34 AM

★ FAVE ◀ SHARE \*\*\* MORE



**HalupkiJoe**

9 Fans

Spot on, fanned and faved

3 JAN 2010 8:15 AM

★ FAVE ◀ SHARE \*\*\* MORE

8 PEOPLE IN THE CONVERSATION

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**Primus Tomlinson** (PrimusElijah)

282 Fans · Serial; semi-colon abuser

★ 3

I think we should also ask ourselves why are we becoming increasingly more allergic to things that humanity have subsisted upon for centuries? Is it because we consume too much? Is it genetically modified foods? Did we just not know what was killing us or making us sick?

We should also realize that being poor is going to lead you with less options about either knowing about it or getting tested for it. In this country it is more expensive to eat healthy. I think you're only fooling yourself to think otherwise.

4 JAN 2010 2:33 PM

★ FAVE ◀ SHARE \*\*\* MORE



**OceanSize**

611 Fans · Lost my mood ring. Not sure how I feel about that.

In the case of gluten, it has everything to do with bio-engineering. Once farmers/researchers figured out that gluten is what makes bread soft & moist, they began cultivating wheat for maximum gluten content, the consequences be damned.

4 JAN 2010 4:40 PM

★ FAVE ◀ SHARE \*\*\* MORE

2 PEOPLE IN THE CONVERSATION

Read Conversation →



**anonymical**

5 Fans

★ 3

When one of my wife's friends showed up in our home 4 years ago as celiac and had us avoid all gluten foods. I thought for sure she was hysterical regarding gluten problems. Yes, I was the person thinking the person was over reacting.

Well, 6 months ago I was tried cutting out gluten after I was suffering from a host of health problems, and I'll be... all of the problems went away! Since the dramatic recovery, doubled energy, gradual weight loss and improved health I have to admit this is very real.

Subsequent attacks when being accidentally \*glutened\* have shattered any skepticism I