


# Could Gluten Be the Hidden Cause of your Health Problems?



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It's quite a shocking thought to many, that wheat - this common, basic food staple, the 'staff of life', could actually be causing a myriad of health problems. Literally causing tissue damage and destruction throughout the body and the brain, and significantly increasing the risk of an early death.

Over the next few months, we're going to explore this fascinating but often shocking topic in some detail. In this edition, we're going to start with a basic overview of this modern epidemic.

The Gluten Free Diet (GFD) has garnered a lot of press recently, both positive and negative, and has been attributed by some as being instrumental in their weight loss or health improvement, and as others as being an extreme, faddy diet.

## So what exactly is Gluten?

Gluten is the name given to a family of storage proteins found in grains.

All grains have gluten, but the specific forms of proteins found in wheat, barley and rye have a toxic effect in people who have the physical susceptibility.

It has been estimated that between 10 and 40 percent of the population have an immune sensitivity to gluten.

This means, that when a food containing gluten is eaten, the immune system launches a defensive reaction, creating inflammation and attacking what it perceives to be a threat.

Unfortunately, this attack is not limited to the proteins found in the food. The immune system also starts to create inflammation and attack tissues in the body. This is known as an auto-immune reaction (meaning, basically, your immune system is attacking you), and Gluten Sensitivity is a systemic, auto-immune condition. Given this information, even the conservative estimate of 10% of the population is an astonishing figure, given that gluten is so abundant in the modern diet.

**The most common tissue damaged by the immune response to gluten is the brain and nervous system, but any structure or organ in the body can be affected.**

If the inflammatory response damages the intestines and the cells in the stomach, it will be difficult to absorb nutrients from food, and the deficiencies caused can lead to problems such as osteoporosis or anaemia.

It can attack the part of the cell that makes energy (the mitochondria), leading to fatigue that can range in severity from feeling 'tired all the time' (sound familiar, anyone?) all the way through to chronic fatigue that can leave one wheelchair bound.

If the inflammation manifests in the joints, it can cause arthritic symptoms and severe pain, or erode the joint until a knee replacement or other surgery is required.

In children, gluten sensitivity is linked to attention deficit disorders, aggression, autistic spectrum behaviours and a myriad of common conditions such as asthma, eczema and 'failure to thrive'.

The list goes on, and I will elaborate further on the systemic complications of Gluten Sensitivity in the next edition.

The noticeable symptoms may be very minor; such as a persistent fungal toenail, slightly elevated liver enzymes or cholesterol, minor headaches or just more colds than other people throughout the year.

In these cases, it's not obvious that gluten is the underlying cause. Who really connects a fungal nail infection

that they've had for years, to the toast and marmalade they ate for breakfast?

One of the manifestations of Gluten Sensitivity, is a condition called **Coeliac Disease**, which affects between 1 and 2% of the population. Coeliac disease means that one of the tissues that the immune system is attacking, is the structure of the small intestine, leading to erosion of the wall of the gut.

Coeliac disease, historically, has received most of the attention regarding it's directing causal relationship with gluten, and non-coeliac gluten sensitivity is only now starting to be better understood and researched, and as a result, taken seriously.

This is unfortunate, because Gluten Sensitivity is very serious indeed. Studies have shown that people with Gluten Sensitivity have a greater rate of all cause mortality (ie from cardiovascular disease or diabetic complications), and also increased rates of certain types of cancer.

So while today your symptom may be that you feel a bit more tired than you used to, or that you're having trouble losing weight or something else minor, the underlying inflammation in your body can be silently building towards something pretty major.

## The Good News

The great news, and it's not all doom and gloom folks, is that gluten exposure is something you can control. If gluten is underlying your health problems, then cutting it out of your diet can have a dramatic impact on your life and on your health.

This is often so marked that it seems miraculous, and can occur within a matter of a day, or a couple of weeks of being gluten free.

I have personally witnessed people coming out of wheelchairs, chronic infections healing, children who were unable to go to school for weeks at a time returning to 'normal' life and many other similar stories.

It is common to lose weight without effort, and have small, niggling problems that were not immediately attributable to gluten clear up.

So if you're not feeling 100% healthy, or the health program that you're on isn't as effective as you'd hoped, it's probably time to consider investigating whether this seemingly innocent foodstuff is actually making you ill.

Robyn will be writing a series of Gluten articles which will culminate in a lecture in March next year to highlight the importance of Gluten.