

## GLUTEN-FREE DIETS

The booming market for gluten-free foods is estimated to be worth some \$5–10 billion, despite the fact that only one percent of the population is diagnosed with coeliac disease.

### why follow a gluten-free diet?

People with coeliac disease must follow a gluten-free diet because gluten is toxic to their intestinal tract, causing them immediate and long-term health problems.

In recent times, gluten-free diets have also become fashionable among mainstream consumers. This is probably because people who eliminate wheat from their diet feel better, and they blame gluten for their past problem. Yet research shows that gluten-containing products are also high in FODMAPs—a group of dietary sugars found to cause irritable bowel, such as bloating, gas, pain, diarrhoea or constipation—and these are the culprits for most irritable bowel symptoms. Still, more research is being conducted to see whether gluten may cause other problems in certain people.

### what is gluten?

Gluten is a protein that's found in many nutritious whole grains such as

wheat, spelt, barley and rye. Since flours and ingredients from such grains are used in many products, gluten is widespread in the food supply. Due to its unique elastic properties, gluten flour has been used for centuries by Buddhist monks (and later Western vegetarians) to create mock meat, chicken and fish. Recent research suggests that as a vegetable protein, gluten may lower cardiovascular risk factors such as triglycerides, uric acid and oxidised cholesterol.

### is going gluten-free healthy?

Switching to a gluten-free diet for just a month has been shown to reduce the level of good bacteria and produce immune suppressive effects. So if you can't tolerate gluten, you can avoid starving your hungry microbiomes by including legumes, vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and naturally gluten-free, minimally processed grains such as quinoa, millet, buckwheat, polenta and brown rice in your diet. This will also significantly improve your intake of protein, iron, calcium and fibre, which are often lacking in gluten-free diets. Work with an experienced health professional to ensure that your diet is adequate.

