



Is Gluten-Free Better?

Gluten-free is a term that seems to be popping up on food labels everywhere you look. Baking mixes, cereal, candy and even ice cream are among the foods that may be “gluten-free.” Does this mean these products are better or more natural? Not necessarily.



What is Gluten?

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. Gluten plays an important role in both the texture and taste of baked products. People with celiac disease, however, can't eat gluten because it will damage their intestines. Awareness of celiac disease and its treatment with a gluten-free diet are on the rise leading to the increase in gluten-free foods we see.



Are Gluten-Free Foods better?

If you have celiac disease, a gluten-free designation on foods can help with selecting safe choices. It is important to remember, however, that gluten-free simply implies that there is no gluten in the food. It does not mean that the food is more healthful or free of any other ingredients. In fact, some gluten-free foods are higher in fat, sugar and total calories and lower in fiber and vitamins than the versions with gluten.



Is a Gluten-Free Diet better for you?

As with any diet, the variety of nutrient dense foods that are included determines how healthy it is. When the selection of foods that can be included is limited, as in the case of the gluten-free diet, extra care needs to be taken to ensure that important nutrients are not missing. If you have celiac disease, a Registered Dietitian can help you get started with a well balanced gluten-free diet. If you do not have celiac disease, it is important to speak with your healthcare provider before starting a gluten-free diet. The evidence for the benefits of a gluten-free diet for other health conditions varies greatly. Simply removing gluten from your diet does not guarantee that you will be healthier, and in fact can make it more likely that you will be missing important nutrients.



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