



Webinar Q&A
Food As Medicine: Nutrition Beyond the Gluten-Free Diet
January 25, 2012
with Rachel Begun, MS, RD



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1. Has there been any link between celiac disease and diverticulitis?

I have not come across any research indicating a link between celiac disease and diverticulitis, although I have known people to have both diseases. As for discussions, you can check out a recent post concerning this topic on NFCA's Ask the Dietitian blog: <http://tinyurl.com/ceciacddiverticulitis>.

2. What resources, such as websites and publications, do you suggest that registered dietitians specializing in celiac disease check on a regular basis to stay current on issues related to celiac disease?

I'm not saying this because the webinar was hosted by NFCA, but their [website](#) is a fantastic resource for getting up-to-date information. In addition to providing resources and continuing education opportunities, the "News" page of the website offers news feeds, food and nutrition blogs from experts, and the opportunity to sign up to receive a newsletter that provides a host of information each month. The [Celiac Sprue Association](#) and [Celiac Disease Foundation](#) websites also provide news feeds. For the latest in celiac disease research, I recommend visiting the websites of [The University of Maryland Center for Celiac Research](#), [The University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center](#), [Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center Celiac Center](#) and [The Celiac Disease Center at Columbia University Medical Center](#), as they post their research papers as well as list the research projects currently being worked on.

3. New to me are 'sea vegetables.' I doubt I've had any, other than seaweed salad in a Japanese restaurant. What else, and where are they sold?

Seaweed salad at Japanese restaurants is the extent of most people's familiarity with sea vegetables. So, you are not alone! Names of the most commonly available sea vegetables include kombu, nori, hijiki, arame, wakame, agar-agar and dulse. They are available in Asian markets, and can also be found in health food markets. They are most often incorporated into dishes at Asian and vegetarian restaurants. Kombu is purchased dry and I have used it as a thickener for

soups and bean dishes. Nori is the dried seaweed used for making sushi and is widely available. The salty, crispy characteristics make it a delicious snack on its own, too. Kids even like it. Agar-agar comes as a powder and also acts as a thickener for cooking. It is often used to provide non-dairy foods with a “creamy” consistency. I have used it to make pudding-like desserts. Dulse can be found in the herbs and spices section, and is a great replacement for your saltshaker. The fresh seaweeds are a great addition to whole grain dishes and soups. Eating them in combination with other ingredients makes their consistency more acceptable.

4. It can be hard to assure safe and healthy eating when eating out in restaurants or in others' homes. It's hard to know if they know about contamination, or what all the ingredients might be. Can you please share some tips?

The key to eating safely outside the home is communication. It's best to tackle each situation separately. I could write a book on this topic, so will try to keep it to a few bullet points for each.

Eating out at restaurants:

- Call the restaurant ahead of time to let them know you have to avoid gluten; be sure to call at a slow time so the person receiving the call has time to make a notation and is not caught up in the lunch or dinner time rushes.
- If possible, review the restaurant's menu online prior to arriving. This way you can review the menu and narrow down your choices to a few options. This will allow you to have a more pointed conversation with the wait staff about the dishes you are interested in, rather than asking a multitude of questions about many options. This will make it easier for the wait staff and, therefore, safer for you.
- When ordering, communicate clearly, assertively and graciously without shame or embarrassment. Also, do not trivialize your need to eat gluten-free.
- Think critically about the ingredients in your dishes and the methods of preparation and ask deliberate questions about what goes into preparing your meal. This includes the ingredients, utensils and surfaces that come into contact with your meal.
- When you receive good service, pay it forward. Let the waitstaff know by telling them and giving a good tip. Spread the word. Let others in the gluten-free community know that you've had a good restaurant experience.

Eating at others' homes:

- Contact the host well in advance of the event date to let them know about your dietary needs. Do not wait until the last minute. Ask the host what they are planning for the menu and the ingredients being used and go from there. If they are open to a conversation, politely let them know about the potential for gluten contamination and provide the basics for how to avoid. If they are open to reworking recipes to take out the gluten, even better.

- Always offer to prepare a couple of dishes. This takes some of the cooking burden off of your host and you'll feel better knowing there are safe dishes for you to eat. It also shows other guests that gluten-free foods can be quite delicious.
- When at your host's home, ask if you can serve yourself first. Once platters are set on the table, they start getting passed around and utensils are being used for different dishes, making contamination likely. Ask the host if you can put together your dish before the platters are put on the table for everyone else. You will feel good knowing your plate is safe and you will be able to eat along with everyone else.
- If you are staying at someone's home for an extended period of time, go shopping at the local market for gluten-free foods, so the burden isn't on your host and you can select the brands and items you prefer. If you don't know what kinds of markets are available, ship or bring with you gluten-free staple foods.

5. What 'soothing methods' can be used when having a painful time? Any food or drink helpful other than ginger and chamomile tea?

When you do get glutened, tea and ginger can be a great way to soothe and settle the stomach. For those who experience diarrhea, it's really important to rehydrate. I recommend rehydrating mostly with lots of water and getting electrolytes by salting your food and eating potassium-rich foods that are easier on the stomach, like bananas. Coconut water is a good option for rehydrating and replenishing electrolytes if you need something with a little flavor to encourage fluid intake. I do not recommend Gatorade-type drinks as they contain lots of sugar and artificial ingredients. Keep the diet simple, eating mild and easily tolerated foods. It's a good idea to avoid dairy and lactose-containing foods, as many are intolerant after coming into contact with gluten. The other important thing is rebuilding the integrity of the gut, which has been damaged. As you pass the initial first few days of recovery, it is important to eat a nutrient-dense diet from fresh, whole foods over the next few weeks and minimize consumption of highly processed foods. I also recommend lots of rest and regular exercise once feeling better and up for it.

6. With the growing popularity of a gluten-free diet, what are the potential risks for those who have NO reason to avoid gluten but follow gluten-free diet for whatever reason?

A gluten-free diet can be quite healthful if choosing a variety of fresh, wholesome foods from all of the food groups, including gluten-free whole grains. However, a diet that relies mostly on highly processed, gluten-free foods can be lacking in nutrients, particularly fiber, iron and B vitamins. Not only are highly processed gluten-free foods devoid of these nutrients, but also they are not required to be fortified with them either. When choosing processed gluten-free foods, choose brands that are fortified. There is no evidence showing that a gluten-free diet leads to weight loss. If highly processed gluten-containing foods are taken out of the diet, and more fresh foods are consumed, this is more likely the reason for experiencing weight loss. Most health professionals recommend a gluten-free diet only for those who have adverse health effects when consuming gluten.

7. How often should we follow-up/retest blood work on antibodies and nutrients? Annually or more often?

Since your physician does testing, it is best to follow their recommendations based on their expertise, medical protocols and understanding of your personal medical history. Maintain a regular rapport with your physician and ask about follow-up testing if they forget to mention it to you.

8. How often should those of us undiagnosed for an extended time- 17 years in my case- follow-up with our specialists, such as gastroenterologist, nutritionist, hematologist, dermatologist, and rheumatologist?

Per my answer to question #7, I recommend that you follow your gastroenterologist's recommendations for follow-up visits, as they know your personal medical and family history. It is important to ask the question if the doctor doesn't offer the information to you. When and how often to see a dietitian is determined by how you are progressing with the gluten-free diet and whether you are experiencing any dietary issues. If diagnostic testing from your doctor indicates you are accidentally being exposed to gluten or are experiencing related GI issues, it is a good idea to work through these issues with a dietitian. If you are having a hard time intentionally avoiding gluten, a dietitian can help you work through the obstacles to staying gluten-free. Regarding other specialists, that is dependent on whether you are experiencing symptoms as well as the protocol they have shared with you.

9. If you have a colonoscopy or endoscopy for any reason other than celiac disease, is the doctor able to tell that you have celiac or does he have to do a biopsy in order to determine that your symptoms are probably due to celiac.

Celiac disease is diagnosed with blood work and by taking a small intestinal biopsy during the endoscopy procedure, not a colonoscopy.

10. Rachel suggested that aspirin should not be taken because it increases intestinal permeability. What is her suggestion for people who take baby aspirin daily as a blood thinner?

I want to start off by stating that I am not a doctor and cannot give medical advice about a personal course of action prescribed to you by your doctor. Your doctors know your medical history best and what is best for your overall health. While there is research showing an association between NSAIDs and hyper-permeability, that doesn't mean that all people taking NSAIDs will experience increased permeability. Every body is different. If you and your gastroenterologist think hyper-permeability is an issue, then that is a discussion the two of you should have. Most important of all, the doctor that prescribed the daily baby aspirin needs to be a part of this discussion as s/he clearly prescribed that course of action for an important health reason. Never go off a prescribed medication or change a course of treatment without first speaking with your doctor(s).

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