



## *Role of Gluten-Free Diet with Autoimmune Diseases*

‘To eat gluten or not to eat gluten’ is the topic du jour. For people with autoimmune disease, what are the benefits of following a gluten free diet? Salonpas spoke with doctors and wellness professionals about gluten free living for people with autoimmune issues. “Eating gluten-free without guidance is dangerous,” says John Doll, Founder of [Gluten Free Daily](#). “There is a right and wrong way to eat gluten-free and your health depends on it. Millions of people turn to gluten-free foods for better health, but without proper guidance, they’re at risk of essential nutrient deficiencies. The big food companies have now saturated the market with processed, gluten free junk food. If your gluten free diet is based on these foods, you will not benefit. You can actually hurt yourself by losing out on vital nutrients, like B vitamins.”

We know gluten is controversial but many of us don’t know what gluten really is. “Gluten is a protein which can trigger immune responses in individuals who are sensitive to this foreign protein,” said [Dr. Glenn Rich](#), a board-certified endocrinologist who practices in Trumbull, Connecticut. “This protein is believed to trigger autoimmune responses and sensitive individuals and has been associated with various autoimmune diseases.”



John Doll, Gluten Free Daily



Glenn Rich MD

“Following a gluten-free diet has become very popular but there still is debate as to which patients would benefit from this,” said Dr. Rich. “Patients with Celiac Disease clearly need a gluten free diet for life. Non-Celiac Gluten Sensitivity (gluten sensitivity) remains somewhat controversial in mainstream medicine but clearly there is evidence that this disorder may be present in up to 10% or more of the population.”

“Not everyone can benefit from a gluten-free diet,” says Kory DeAngelo, a registered dietitian at the Bastyr Center for Natural Health, a science-based natural health university with a [clinic](#) in Seattle that offers naturopathic medicine, acupuncture, nutrition, counseling and Ayurveda. “If someone has a gluten sensitivity or intolerance, they can benefit. Keep in mind that there are a lot of processed foods that are labeled as gluten-free, but this does not make them healthy.”

What, if any, benefits does a person with an [autoimmune disease](#) secure from gluten-free eating? “This question hits me personally,” says John Doll. “I have an autoimmune disease called autoimmune vasculitis, which is a disease that affects my blood vessels through inflammation. Although I suffered quite a few symptoms, one major symptom was red spots due to damaged blood vessels and bleeding underneath the skin. I spent 5 years on different medications, the strongest being methotrexate, a form of chemotherapy. Without changing my diet, not one medication was able to reduce my symptoms. It wasn’t until I changed my diet that I began seeing improvements. My diet was breeding inflammation throughout my body. First I went gluten free and began seeing improvements. My vascular bleeding stopped and my spots went away. Next, I eliminated as much refined sugar, corn, and processed ingredients as I could. My body weight stabilized and my strength and energy increase. Cleaning up my diet is what saved my life. I no longer take medication for my condition. I simply eat healthy.”

“If someone has gluten sensitivity, some benefits from eating gluten-free can include more energy, better digestion, improved nutrient status,” says DeAngelo. “For example, if you have a gluten sensitivity it may cause GI distress, headaches, joint pain or brain fog, which can be alleviated when eating gluten-free.”

“Gluten has been implicated in many disorders,” says Dr. Rich. “Often patients will have gastrointestinal symptoms, headaches and fatigue. There is a strong association with autoimmune diseases such as Hashimoto’s hypothyroidism and rheumatologic disorders. There is also mounting evidence that gluten may be linked to many other disorders such as allergies, neurologic diseases, fibromyalgia just to name a few.

Are there medical markers that can be measured after an autoimmune disease patient goes gluten free? “Autoimmune markers of celiac disease such as and Anti-Tissue Transglutaminase Antibody and IgA Endomysial Assays can disappear in patients with celiac and a gluten free diet,” says Dr. Rich. “For patients who have Non-Celiac Gluten Sensitivity, there are no clear autoimmune markers that can be followed.”

“We’ve received many testimonials of patients saying they had to be on certain medications for cholesterol, blood pressure, thyroid and various other things,”



Sara Doll, Gluten Free Daily

says Sara Doll, NASM Certified Personal Trainer & Nutrition Specialist at [Gluten Free Daily](#). “After changing their diet to a clean eating gluten free diet and staying away from processed foods and sugar, they were able to improve their blood tests within normal and come off of their medication completely. Whole foods are nature’s best medicine!

“We know autoimmune diseases result from the immune system attacking the body’s tissues,” says John Doll. “We also know an increase in inflammation is a common result. Although inflammation is sometimes good, if it doesn’t go away, it can be very damaging. Chronic inflammation can damage your gut/intestines, joints, blood vessels, heart, lungs, bones, body weight, ...the list goes on and on. To help reduce inflammation, you want to eat clean. You generally want to consume foods that help keep your blood sugar low and stable, and your omega fatty acids in balance. You also want

to consume foods that promote healthy digestion. Gluten is not the only food that can cause inflammation, but it's a big one. Following a clean gluten free diet, in addition to eliminating refined sugars, bad oils and saturated fats, is a great way to help reduce inflammation. Once again, we're getting back to consuming healthy complex carbs, clean nutrient rich foods, and eliminating refined sugars and processed ingredients."

What is the role of immune enhancing supplements with green tea and other ingredients in helping or flaring up an autoimmune response? "Focusing on food is best," says DeAngelo. "Drinking green tea can help reduce inflammation in the body, which can help in flares. Other foods that have been shown to lower inflammation is cooking herbs and spices, tea, eating 7-10 servings of fruits and vegetables per day, and swapping meat, dairy, and eggs with plant proteins like beans, nuts, and seeds. Including healthy fats like nuts, olives, avocados, and seeds can also reduce inflammation."

"Autoimmune diseases are the result of an imbalance in the immune system but regular consumption of green tea can help neutralize this imbalance through antioxidants," says Sara Doll. "The antioxidants found in green tea have many immune strengthening properties which can protect against free radicals."

How long can it take to see improvement once you stop eating gluten? "Most people see a benefit between 2-4 weeks after eliminating gluten," says DeAngelo. "Remember that if you choose to go gluten-free, the best way to eat gluten-free is to eat whole foods that are naturally gluten-free, not processed gluten-free products."

"In patients who have unexplained symptoms of not feeling well or other inflammatory processes I consider gluten sensitivity," says Dr. Rich. "Since there is no simple test for the diagnoses of gluten sensitivity, I recommend to patient's a trial of gluten free diet for 3-6 months. Some patients may feel relief of



Kory DeAngelo, Dietician

symptoms early on while others it may take some time. At best, a trial of a gluten free diet can markedly improve someone's life and, at worst, they eat healthier for 6 months."

"Bloating often goes away as soon as you go gluten free," says John Doll. "Rashes can clear up within a couple days. Damage to ones intestines can take longer, it really depends on how bad the damage is. An overall range can be from a matter of days, up to 6 months. It's important for people to be patient through the healing process."

"I believe everyone can benefit from swapping out their refined simple carbs (e.g. breads and flours) for healthier whole-grain complex carbs (e.g. brown rice and vegetables)," says John Doll. "Complex carbs are better for your cells, brain, energy, and blood sugar. Eating whole-grain complex carbs will also help reduce the onset of many diseases, like diabetes. For everyone, the gluten free diet is a great road map for those wanting to make healthier swaps."

For more information on living a healthy lifestyle, please "like" Salonpas on [Facebook](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Google Plus](#)!

<http://salonpas.us/blog/role-gluten-free-diet-autoimmune-diseases/>