

Chapter 1

Gluten-Free: Not Just a Diet, It's a Lifestyle

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If you've been eating gluten (technically and in DannaSpeak that would make you a *glutenivore*) for a long time — like, oh, say, most of your life — then giving up foods as you know them like bread, pasta, pizza, cookies, crackers, and, yes, beer may seem like a tough transition at first.

You may be cooking gluten-free for one of the following reasons:

- ✓ You may have been diagnosed with gluten sensitivity or celiac disease.
- ✓ You may be cooking for someone who has been told he has to eliminate gluten from his diet.
- ✓ You may have read the many reasons a gluten-free diet is healthier, and you've decided to give it a try.
- ✓ You may have just found this book in the discount aisle of the bookstore and wondered what it's all about.

No matter why you're cooking gluten-free, you'll find that cooking gluten-free is an art form, and one that sometimes takes a little retuvenation on your part to figure out what is and isn't allowed on the diet.

Did I say diet? Because this is really more than that — it's a lifestyle. Sure, it's a diet in the sense that it concerns the things you put in your mouth — but for most people, choosing to be gluten-free is a long-term commitment, and one that affects every aspect of their lives.

Making lifestyle changes requires conscious changes in your outlook on eating. It requires long-term commitments and a great deal of education. Starting with, “What is gluten, anyway?!?”

Defining Gluten in Layman's Terms

There are a couple of ways to define gluten, and interestingly, the definitions actually contradict each other a little bit.

One way to define it is the scientific definition, and it involves life-of-the-party terminology like gliadin, secalin, hordein, and prolamins. This scientific definition further explains that gluten is found in all grains — yep, you heard right. All grains. Rice. Corn. All of 'em. Yet we only eliminate wheat, rye, and barley on the gluten-free diet. Well, that's why there's a layman's definition.

The layman's definition of gluten is “a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley.”



Although oats don't contain gluten in and of themselves, we avoid them on the gluten-free diet because of cross-contamination issues that may arise during the production process.

So something that's gluten-free, by definition, is wheat-free. But it doesn't necessarily hold true the other way around.

Wheat worries

Gluten-free means wheat-free, but wheat-free doesn't necessarily mean gluten-free.

Something can be wheat-free but still contain gluten if it has, for instance, malt, which is usually derived from barley. In that case, the food would be wheat-free but not gluten-free because barley contains gluten.

A lot of confusion is caused by labels claiming to be “wheat-free” when the products are not. Spelt and kamut are two examples. They're definitely not wheat-free (they're actually forms of wheat), yet they're commonly marketed as being wheat-free, or being wheat alternatives. Calling spelt a

wheat alternative is like calling me a human alternative. Last time I checked, I was a human, regardless of what some people might think; and spelt is, regardless of what they call it, wheat. And because spelt and kamut are forms of wheat, they are *not* gluten-free, no matter what the package says.

Common foods that contain gluten

Sometimes when I rattle off the foods that commonly contain gluten, people stare at me as though I've just recited *War and Peace* or something. It's true, the list is long. Our society has become accustomed to eating gobs and gobs of gluten; it's the most prevalent food type by far.

You can find more detail on the foods and ingredients that are okay and those that aren't in Chapter 3. As a general rule, anything with flour (white or wheat) is a no-no when you're avoiding gluten. These are some of the more obvious offenders:

- ✓ Bagels
- ✓ Baked goods (cookies, cakes, brownies, and so on)
- ✓ Beer
- ✓ Bread
- ✓ Cereal
- ✓ Crackers
- ✓ Malt
- ✓ Pasta
- ✓ Pizza
- ✓ Pretzels
- ✓ Soy sauce

It's important to note that there are not-so-obvious offenders, too, like natural flavorings and licorice. So you'll have to get comfortable reading labels, memorizing ingredients, and calling manufacturers to find out more details about their ingredients. (Again, Chapter 3 can help you get started.)

Don't be discouraged. Although the list may appear daunting at first, it's important to remember that the list of things you *can* eat on the gluten-free diet is a lot longer than the list of things you can't. Furthermore, for every product in this list, there's a delicious gluten-free substitution available. I talk more about specialty items and where you can find them in Chapter 6.

Deciding Whether You Should Be Gluten-Free

In the chapter opening, I pointed out that being gluten-free is a lifestyle change; that means dedication and commitment if you choose to adopt this lifestyle. So why would you do it?

Many people who go gluten-free do so not because they have any of the conditions listed in this section, but because they're striving for a healthier lifestyle.

Connie and I believe gluten isn't good for anyone (more on that in Chapter 2), especially in the highly refined form that most people know, like bread, bagels, and pasta. Cutting wheat and other gluten-containing grains out of your diet certainly isn't a bad thing and can have significant health benefits if you eat a wholesome, diverse diet. Heck, it can even be the key to maintaining your weight!

Maybe you'll find it compelling to adopt a gluten-free lifestyle when you realize that the gluten-free diet may relieve or even completely alleviate these health problems (and more):

- ✓ Headaches (including migraines)
- ✓ Fatigue
- ✓ Gastrointestinal distress (including gas, bloating, diarrhea, constipation, reflux)
- ✓ Depression and anxiety
- ✓ Joint pain
- ✓ Infertility
- ✓ Autistic behaviors
- ✓ ADD/ADHD behaviors

Wipe that look off your face; I've seen it before. I rattle off all these things that a gluten-free diet can help with, and people give me that incredulous I'm-gonna-make-her-feel-stupid-now-and-catch-her-in-her-exaggeration look, and they challenge me, "Reeeaaally? Alllll those things can be helped with a gluten-free diet?" Yeah. Really.

This isn't a diet du jour. I realize that new diets pop up faster than celebrity babies with odd names, and that the diets last about as long as the celebrity marriages do. This is a lifestyle. It's a lifestyle that's perfectly in sync with the way our bodies were designed to eat — and that's why it's so effective in improving our health.

Our bodies weren't designed to eat that junk listed in the "Common foods that contain gluten" section. Bagels? Cereal? Pasta? I don't *think* so! Our bodies can rebel against those foods in ways that can sometimes severely compromise our health, and for many people, the gluten-free diet is the best — sometimes the only — treatment.

Chapter 2 explains more about gluten's effect on the body. For extensive, detailed information about the many medical conditions that benefit from a gluten-free diet, see the companion book to this one, *Living Gluten-Free For Dummies* (Wiley).

Doing Gluten-Free Nutritiously

As much as I preach about being gluten-free, I also urge people to eat a healthy diet — and the two don't always go together. I'm tempted to say there's the "right" way and the "wrong" way to do gluten-free, but that would sound a tad opinionated (who, me!?!), so I'll stick to calling them the healthy and unhealthy ways (no opinionation there, right?).

The easiest way to do gluten-free is also the unhealthiest. I call it the Simple Substitution method — you stroll through the aisles of your friendly health food store and find product after product with cute little "gluten-free" logos that make it oh-so-easy for you to identify those products as being safe on your gluten-free diet! But being gluten-free doesn't make it healthy. The fact that those products are packaged and labeled generally makes them unhealthy — albeit gluten-free.

The healthiest way to go is to stick to the "If man made it, don't eat it" rule of thumb. That means cutely labeled, processed foods aren't gonna cut it. Don't get me wrong — there are some very nutritious packaged products out there. I'm trying to generalize here, and from a bird's-eye view, the healthiest way to be gluten-free is to stick to natural, inherently gluten-free foods.



The healthiest way to eat is to follow the advice: If man made it, don't eat it.

It's pretty simple, really. Foods that fall into the "if man made it, don't eat it" allowable selections include lean meat, poultry, fish, seafood, fruits, veggies, nuts, and berries.

One pitfall people fall into when they go gluten-free is that they turn to rice, corn, and potatoes. Those would seem healthy enough, and appear to pass the "if man made it" criterion — but those foods really offer very little in the way of nutritional value, and on top of it, they're high glycemic index foods that may make you pack on the pounds. (If you didn't follow that high glycemic index part, don't worry — we talk about that more in Chapter 4.)

I encourage you to explore unique gluten-free grains-that-aren't-really-grains-but-we-call-them-grains like quinoa, millet, buckwheat, and teff. They're nutritional powerhouses loaded with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and protein — and they offer unique flavors and diverse consistencies. They're a great break from the rice, corn, and potatoes routine and pack a far more powerful nutritional punch. Chapter 3 has a lot more details on these and other gluten-free alternatives.

Getting Ready to Cook

Well, that's it. You're ready. You know why gluten-free's the way to be, and you're either committed to the gluten-free lifestyle, cooking for someone who is, or just toying with gluten-free recipes. Either way, enough chit-chat: It's time to get ready to cook!

"Getting ready to cook" means more than just donning your favorite apron, especially when you're cooking gluten-free. It usually involves a little planning, some shopping, and preparation to make sure your gluten-free food stays gluten-free.



The gluten-free lifestyle may be restricted, but it's definitely not *restrictive*.

Figuring out what to buy and where to buy it

I highly recommend planning your meals in advance. Sometimes gluten-free cooking requires ingredients you might not normally have on-hand, and you don't want to get halfway through a recipe to discover you don't happen to have any xanthan gum handy.

I also encourage you to experiment with unique, gluten-free alternatives such as quinoa, millet, buckwheat, teff, sorghum, and wild rice (more on these in Chapter 3). They're loaded with nutrition, and offer you the opportunity to think outside your usual menu plan and add new flavors, consistencies, and combinations.

Some of the unusual ingredients you may want to have on hand include xanthan gum (be prepared to sell one of your children to afford it), guar gum (when you try it for the first time, don't stray far from the potty because it can cause — ahem — “gastrointestinal distress” in some people), and unique flours like rice, tapioca, potato, and mesquite.

You can buy these specialty items online or at health food or specialty stores, co-ops, or farmers' markets; we talk more about where to find these specialty ingredients in Chapter 6.

Keep in mind that if you do gluten-free the healthiest way possible, you can find all the ingredients you need in a regular grocery store — around the perimeter. You'll just be shopping for lean meats, poultry, fish, seafood, fruits, veggies, nuts, and berries. You'll be happy, healthy, gluten-free, and relieved that you don't have to track down tapioca starch at 10 p.m.

Setting up your kitchen

Thankfully, when you decide to adopt a gluten-free lifestyle, reorganizing and setting up your kitchen is a one-time deal — and you'll pick up some habits that you'll ease into nicely. Oh, and the oven really works in your kitchen!

Setting up your kitchen just means you have to think about *cross-contamination*. Cross-contamination is when you accidentally glutenize your perfectly good gluten-free meal because you toasted your gluten-free bread in a toaster that has gluten-containing crumbs clinging on for dear life.

Crumbs can kill. Not literally, really, but they're killer in a kitchen where gluten-freebies share space with *glutenators* (people who eat gluten). Using separate utensils for cooking, and even having a few separate appliances, is a good idea. Chapter 5 covers everything you need to know about readying your kitchen and pantry for gluten-free cooking.



You don't need completely separate utensils and pots and pans for your gluten-free cooking. Washing thoroughly between preparations is fine for removing gluten left over from cooking.

Wiping away crumbs between dish preparations is crucial, and you'll find that even the order in which you cook things is altered when you're cooking gluten-free. You don't, for instance, want to fry a gluten-free grilled-cheese sandwich in the same pan you just cooked a regular sandwich in unless you thoroughly washed the skillet in between. (The easier solution is to cook the gluten-free sandwich first.) You'll get it; it's not rocket science, but it *is* crucial to keeping your kitchen as safe as it can be.



You may find it helpful to have a separate area in your pantry or kitchen to keep gluten-free products. It makes them easier to find and reduces the chances that someone's going to goof.

Cooking without Recipes (But You Can Use Them if You Like)

Connie and I believe if you give someone a recipe, you feed 'em for a meal. Teach them to make *anything* gluten-free, and you feed 'em for a lifetime. Okay, we kind of borrowed that concept from the Native American saying, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a meal. *Teach* him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime," but you probably figured that out.

The point is, you *can* make anything gluten-free, and you're not constrained by recipes or the fact that you can't use regular flour or bread crumbs. You only need a little creativity and some basic guidelines for using gluten-free substitutions, which you'll find in Chapter 7.

If you're a die-hard recipe fan, never fear — we have them here. Real Cookbook Author Connie spent months developing the amazing recipes for this book. Most of them are super-simple to follow but leave your guests with the impression that you spent all day in the kitchen (and being thusly indebted, they're expected to do the dishes).

But I'm not a Real Cookbook Author. I don't "do" recipes. I'm more of a toss-it-in-and-see-how-it-tastes-then-modify-from-there type of cook. It stinks, because I can never make the same dish twice. I don't measure (who has the patience?), I don't *ever* have all of the specified ingredients on hand, nor do I know how to pronounce them or where I'd find them if I looked, and "proofing" to me involves finding typos or errors in my writing (turns out, that's a bread term that means "to rise"). Suffice it to say that I'm no Julia Child, but I don't have to be, and neither do you.

Connie and I believe that the most important element of cooking gluten-free is to be creative and think outside the recipe box. So I hand you a pole and say go forth and fish. May your gluten-free goodies be gastrolicious, and your fish be free of bones.

Getting Excited about the Gluten-Free Lifestyle

Most people who embark upon a gluten-free lifestyle are doing so because of health issues, and that means they have little or no choice in the matter. When people are forced to make changes in their routine, especially changes that affect what they can and can't eat, they're not always so quick to see the joy in the adjustments.

The truth is, we envision ourselves skipping merrily down a nicely paved road of life, eating what we want when we want. We don't envision ourselves having to dodge cleverly disguised gluten-laden land mines scattered about like worms after a hard rain (worms are gluten-free, in case you were wondering).

So if you're a little less than — ahem — *excited* about being gluten-free, I understand. But prepare yourself to have that frown turned upside down because there are lots of reasons to be excited about the gluten-free lifestyle.

Gluten-free doesn't mean flavor-free

People who are new to the concept of gluten-free sometimes comment that the diet is boring. When I ask what they're eating, their cuisine routine usually centers around bunny food and rice cakes. Well *duh!* Who wouldn't be bored with that?!? That type of a diet is appalling, not appealing.



I'll tell you right now I *love* food. I love the flavor, the feeling of being full, the nutritional value it provides — most of all, I love to explore new foods I've never tried before, as long as they're gluten-free, of course. There's no way I'd encourage you to endure a diet of blandiose foods that could double as packing materials.

A healthy, gluten-free diet doesn't have to be boring or restrictive. You're not constrained to eating 32 individual portions of fruits and vegetables each day, like a rabbit nibbling nervously on carrots. If you enjoy bland foods, snaps for you. But if you think gluten-free has to be flavor-free, you're in for a pleasant surprise.

Think about it. Spices are gluten-free. Onions, garlic, peppers, and other flavor-enhancing foods are gluten-free. There's really no need to languish over lackluster flavors just because you're enjoying the health benefits of being gluten-free. So slice, dice, and spice it up for a meal that's flavorful, not flavor-free.

Getting out and about

There's no reason to let the gluten-free lifestyle hold you back from doing anything you want to do. Well, okay, there are some things you can't do — like eat a Domino's pizza and Krispy Kreme donuts. But as far as your activities and lifestyle are concerned, it's important to get out and about as you always have.

I realize that for the most part it's not as easy as walking into a restaurant and asking for the gluten-free menu (a girl can dream). But eating at restaurants is definitely doable; you just need to master the art of the special order and tune in to contamination concerns. Traveling is a breeze after you're comfortable eating at restaurants *and* when you get a handle on language considerations if you're traveling abroad. Going to social events just requires a little advance planning, and holidays will barely faze you — after you get the hang of getting out and about gluten-free style.



Living your life in a bubble is for helium molecules. The gluten-free lifestyle shouldn't hold you back from doing anything (except eating gluten).

Raising kids to love the lifestyle

There are lots of things that are key in raising happy, healthy, gluten-free kids. Some of the highlights include

- ✓ Giving them control of their diet from day one
- ✓ Always having yummy gluten-free treats on hand
- ✓ Reinforcing the benefits of the gluten-free lifestyle
- ✓ Always remembering that they're learning from *you* how to feel about their lifestyle

For more inspiration and practical advice, see my book *Kids with Celiac Disease: A Family Guide to Raising Happy, Healthy, Gluten-Free Children*.



Kids are flexible and resilient. Adopting a new lifestyle like being gluten-free is usually harder for the parents than it is for the child.

Setting realistic expectations

Some people call me PollyDanna because they think I have an unrealistically optimistic view of the gluten-free lifestyle. It may be optimistic, but it's not unrealistic.

It's important to set reasonable expectations for what things will be like when you adopt a gluten-free lifestyle, because there *will* be challenges and you need to prepare to handle them well. Friends, family, and loved ones may not understand. They may not accommodate your diet when you hope or expect they will. You may find social events to be overwhelming at first; or you may get confused or frustrated and feel like giving up on the diet. There *will* be challenges — and you *will* overcome them.

Arming yourself with good information

The good news is that because the gluten-free diet is exploding in popularity, there's lots of information about it. The bad news is there's lots of information about it, and not all of it's accurate. Be leery of what you hear and read, and check the reliability of the source on everything. If you find conflicting information — and I'll warn you now that you will — dig deeper until you find out which source is right.

I cite a few good sources of information in Chapter 3, and I'm sure you'll find more on your own. Just remember to keep a skeptical eye out for the good, the bad, and the completely ludicrous.

How I got pushed into the deep end of the gluten-free pool

Here's my story about how I joined the ranks of the gluten-free.

I didn't aspire to do any of this. I was deeply involved in a successful career, and a mommy first and foremost. But today I'm an accidental author, researcher, and support group founder who was pushed into the deep end of the gluten-free pool and realized I needed to learn to swim. Fast.

Until 1991, my family and I ate a fairly typical American diet. Oh, I tried to keep it nutritious (extra cheese on the spaghetti to add protein), and I was aware of the need to limit fat and calories (scratch the extra cheese), but we didn't spend a lot of time worrying about what we ate or the long-term effects food might have on our bodies. We pretty much took eating for granted.

All of that changed in an instant when my first child, Tyler, was about 9 months old and developed what seemed to be chronic diarrhea. The pediatrician chalked it up to the antibiotics Ty was taking for ear infections and told me to call if it hadn't cleared up in a few weeks. Three weeks later, I was back in the pediatrician's office. "Yep, he still has diarrhea," the doctor

declared with confidence. "Yeah, I know. That's why I'm here," I mumbled with self-restraint worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize. "Give him foods that will plug him up like crackers and bread — and call me if it hasn't cleared up in a few weeks." *Huh?!?* That's the best you can do? My Pampers bill is higher than your paycheck, my hands are raw from washing them every six minutes, and I do eight loads of laundry a day because everything we own is covered in diarrhea, and you want me to "plug him up" and wait another three weeks? I don't *think* so!

I waited. Not patiently (patience isn't my greatest strength), but I waited. What choice did I have? Three weeks later, after another perfunctory examination of his ears, nose, and throat (did I lead you to believe this problem was *above* the waist, Doctor?!?), he made that "mmhhmmmm" noise that doctors make when they figure out the problem. Yay! We were finally going to get some answers! "Yep. He still has diarrhea." All those years of medical school had really paid off. "Don't worry about it. He's not dehydrated, and he's in the 75th percentile for height and weight. It's nothing to be concerned about." Gee, could the fact that I practically infuse him with liquids

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have anything to do with the fact that he's not dehydrated? And does the fact that he started off in the 99th percentile and has *dropped* to the 75th mean anything? Apparently not. I was instructed not to bring him back for diarrhea, because there was nothing to be concerned about. If I was going to insist on bringing him back, I'd be fired from that pediatric office. I guess they meant it.

Doctor number two agreed with doctor number one. After a quick look in Ty's ears, nose, and throat, he declared that we had a healthy baby boy. "But what about the diarrhea?" I eeked. "Really, it's nothing to worry about. He's a healthy height and weight, he's not dehydrated, and he looks fine to me," he chirped as he raced to his next four-minute appointment. Oh, good. I'm glad he *looks* fine to you. I considered offering to give Doctor Do-Nothing a close *look* at the 22 diarrhea diapers a day that I was changing, but somehow managed to control myself.

In desperation, we changed doctors again, and — long story short — a quick look in the ears, nose, and throat turned up — you guessed it — nothing. By this time, Tyler's belly had grown hugely distended, his arms and legs were wasted to skinny little limbs, his hiney had disappeared completely, and his personality had changed. He had transformed from a lively, energetic toddler to a listless, irritable, clingy, and quiet little boy. It had been nearly a year since the diarrhea first started, and we figured we were just neurotic first-time parents with a mellow kid who pooped a lot.

Eventually, we ended up in the hands of doctor number four. By this time, "realizing" there was nothing wrong with Tyler, I thought nothing of dragging a lifeless baby with a Biafra belly into the pediatrician's office for a routine visit. After

looking in Tyler's ears, nose, and throat, he laid Tyler down on his back and thumped on his belly like you might thump a honeydew melon to see if it's ripe. "My goodness," he said with that I'm-alarmed-but-I'm-a-doctor-and-don't-want-to-freak-you-out-so-I'll-talk-in-my-pediatrician—baby-talk-voice-that-will-surely-calm-you tone, "What's going on with his belly? It's very distended." I couldn't answer through the tears of relief.

After testing for cystic fibrosis, blood diseases, and cancer, we finally got the bittersweet diagnosis. "Your son has celiac disease." *Huh?* Is that anything like the flu? Surely a few weeks of antibiotics will wipe it out. "He'll need to be on a gluten-free diet for the rest of his life."

I don't have room here to give the details of the rest of the story, but you can read it in my other books or on my Web sites. Suffice it to say that the words "for the rest of his life" had a huge impact, and we realized it was time to step up to the plate and do some research and lifestyle and attitude adjustments to help ourselves — and others.

When we were told that Tyler would have to lead a gluten-free lifestyle, we had come to a fork in the road. At first, we were devastated, confused, frustrated, and grief-stricken. But we knew there was another path we could choose — a path that would have a more positive effect on Tyler's life. As we learned to live with the diet and its ramifications, we worked hard to find a way to turn the adversity into a positive force in our lives. More than a decade later, I realize that what we once interpreted as misfortune has actually been a huge blessing in our lives — and most importantly, Tyler agrees.