

## Chapter 1

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

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Making long-term choices
  - ▶ Getting the goods on gluten
- 

**I**f 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.

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?!" This chapter serves as a jumping-off point into the world of gluten-free cooking.

## *Defining Gluten in Layman's Terms*

You can define gluten in a couple of ways, 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, you 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  | ✓ Malt      |
| ✓ Baked goods (cookies, cakes, brownies, and so on) | ✓ Pasta     |
| ✓ Beer  | ✓ Pizza     |
| ✓ Bread   | ✓ Pretzels  |
| ✓ Cereal  | ✓ Soy sauce |
| ✓ Crackers  |             |

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.)

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 7.

## *Deciding Whether You Should Be Gluten-Free*

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? Allll 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* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).

## 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.

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” general rule. That means cutely labeled, processed foods aren’t gonna cut it. Don’t get me wrong — some very nutritious packaged products are 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

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. These sections help you get started on the right foot.



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, 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 7.

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 killers 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 people 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 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 never have all 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 regular pizza and 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 always 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*

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. 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 Kids*.

## *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.

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.