



The truth about gluten-free diets

Are there any advantages or benefits of a gluten-free diet to your overall health? We spoke to a few nutritionists who shared their views on this health trend, and how to do the diet right

WORDS MICHELLE YEE

Gluten-free diets have been around for many years, and were originally designed to combat celiac disease – a serious autoimmune disorder that virtually destroys the intestinal tract. Explaining more about coeliac disease, Ms Jaclyn Reutens, a nutrition dietitian from Aptima says, "Coeliac disease is an autoimmune disease; when gluten is ingested the immune system attacks the small intestinal lining thereby damaging it, leading to malabsorption of nutrients. Coeliacs will feel bloated as a result and also experience lower energy levels because they are unable to absorb nutrients efficiently due to the damaged intestinal lining. Which is why following a gluten-free diet relieves those problems for them."

The condition will only improve if gluten is eliminated from the diet. But apart from being well-received among those who are gluten intolerant, gluten-free diets have also been gaining popularity among health conscious individuals who do not have any wheat allergies, as they believe that consuming gluten-free products are

beneficial to their health.

According to dietitians and nutritionists, there are some health benefits of going gluten-free including increased energy levels as a healthy gluten-free diet encourage consumption of wholesome and well-balanced diet; weight loss due to change in calorie and fibre content in daily diet; as well as higher intake of essential vitamins and minerals from crunching on fresh fruits and vegetables.

"Gluten-free diets have rapidly been growing in popularity the past couple of years, and this health trend has had a major impact on the food industry, across manufacturers, supermarkets and even restaurants. Just take a stroll down the supermarket aisle, and you'll see tons of foods plastered with gluten-free labels.

But that said, not all foods with gluten-free labels are healthy, and it is important to study the ingredients listed on the food labels before purchasing.

Gluten-free foods can be highly processed too. Due to the rise of popularity of gluten-free trend, there are many highly processed, or made with refined version of gluten-free grains

products available in the market. A good thumb rule is to choose products that have whole foods listed as the first three ingredients and be sceptical of products with long lists of ingredients.

Lastly, the basis of healthy gluten-free diets should be natural whole foods such as lean meat and fish, fruits and vegetables, low fat dairy products, and naturally gluten-free grains like brown rice and quinoa. By replacing gluten-containing processed foods with lower calorie and higher fibre whole foods, brings the awesome health benefits to many," says Ms Pang Shu Ying, a dietitian from Keen Lifestyle.

COMMON MISCONCEPTION OF GLUTEN

Gluten isn't in every type of grain, there are several grains that are naturally gluten-free, including rice, corn, quinoa, buckwheat, millet and oats. The gluten-free whole grain provides more fibre and many important nutrients, and including them in your diet in the correct portion benefits your health.

A poorly planned gluten-free diet also can be fattening as some gluten-free processed foods are no healthier than their counterparts. When products are formulated specifically to be gluten-free in order to replace an existing product, manufacturers may have to add extra fat, sugar and salt to improve their flavour or texture and result in higher in calories which is likely to promote weight gain.



The convictions that gluten-free diets are generally healthier depend on what kind of gluten-free foods you are eating. Many people who go gluten-free only focus on avoiding gluten-containing foods but it is also important to emphasise what you do eat to balance your diet and ensure you are taking in a broad spectrum of nutrients.

WHERE TO SHOP FOR GLUTEN-FREE PRODUCTS?

RYAN'S GROCERY

29 Binjai Park
Tel: 65/6463-3933
www.ryansgrocery.com

LITTLE FARMS

#01-20, Valley Point Shopping Centre,
491 River Valley Road
Tel: 65/6262-0619
www.littlefarms.com

