Is There a Link Between Psoriasis and Gluten?

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The Truth About Psoriasis and Gluten, and How to Use It to Your Advantage

Research has found that up to two million Americans suffer from a gluten allergy (celiac disease), and many psoriasis patients are among them. There's still a good deal of mystery surrounding the connection between psoriasis and gluten, but studies have shown that a substantial amount of psoriasis sufferers have seen their symptoms improve with a gluten-free diet.

Gluten isn't exactly a food — rather, it's a type of protein that is found in grain products. Many people equate gluten with wheat, but other grains like barley, rye and oats contain the protein, too.

Going gluten-free can be a healthy change, but unless you are predisposed to the negative effects of gluten, your psoriasis won't necessarily improve. Consider the benefits, challenges, and demands of a gluten-free lifestyle before you make the switch.

Is a Gluten-Free Diet Right for You?

Despite what the advertisements might have you believe, gluten isn't unequivocally evil. It's a protein that some people can't digest, but then again, other bodies can handle it just fine.

Going gluten-free demands a commitment, so before you dive in headfirst, find out if you stand a good chance of benefiting from the move with the help of:

- **Screening**. Your doctor can conduct a specific blood test to determine whether or not you have celiac disease. Gluten intolerance may be more difficult to catch with medical screening.
- **An elimination diet**. If you're not sure what part of your diet is causing you problems, you can cut out certain foods and slowly introduce them again to catch the culprit.
- **Genetic testing**. A 2010 study revealed that psoriasis patients with the HLA CW6 gene had an increased sensitivity to the gluten protein. If you know whether or not you have this gene, it could clear things up for you.

Simply adopting a gluten-free eating plan without knowing if you have an intolerance might not be a good plan. Once you can determine just how sensitive you are to gluten, you can take the necessary steps to reduce or remove it from your diet.

Sticking With Your Psoriasis Diet

Any specialized diet plan can be tough to stick to, especially if it's particularly limiting in one area. Since wheat and other grains (and their derivatives) are a principal source of carbohydrates, you'll have to find another place to get your readily-available energy, and that might mean shaking up the rest of your menu.

In order to avoid gluten completely, you'll also have to take more control of your eating and cooking habits.

Know Your Grains

It's important to do your homework when it comes to grains and cereals. Wheat and barley are clearly off-limits, but are you aware of all of the ingredients that come from them?

Next page: hidden sources of gluten to watch out for.

Sticking With Your Psoriasis Diet

There are plenty of hidden sources of gluten derived from grains, including:

- Malt vinegar (barley)
- Soy sauce (barley)
- Rye (barley)
- Semolina (wheat)
- Spelt (wheat)
- Kamut (wheat)

Get in the habit of reading ingredient lists very closely, and be wary of any and all additives. If you're not entirely sure if an ingredient may have gluten, look it up before you buy — even a little bit of gluten can cause serious trouble when your body can't tolerate it well.

Whole foods are generally safer, as long as they aren't a part of a grain that produces gluten.

Cook for Yourself

Life will be much easier if you can do away with prepackaged meals and store-bought preparations. Sure, this will mean you have to put in some more kitchen time, but there are some major rewards: you'll know for certain there's no gluten in your meals, you'll sidestep any nasty preservatives, and you'll save money.

You may also find yourself eating a lot healthier when you're controlling the amount of fat and salt that goes into each dish.

Focus on Vegetables

Going gluten-free doesn't automatically make you healthier — you'll have to make smart substitutions for a wholesome, balanced diet. If grains made up a substantial part of your plate before, it's time to find some good veggie stand-ins.

You should aim to take in a colorful range of vegetables and fruit each week, but it's alright to fall back on some favorites more often than not.

Zucchini is surprisingly versatile: use a vegetable peeler to make thin ribbons for a salad, invest in a spiralizer to make zucchini noodles in place of pasta, grate it up and make fritters, or scoop out the centers and use the zucchini boats for favorite fillers.

Pick up a Paleo Cookbook

If you find it hard to come up with a variety of good gluten-free recipes on a daily basis, or you're tired of buying specialty ingredients, follow the lead of another eating plan that happens to align with a gluten-free lifestyle.

The paleo diet is based on the idea that the human body has not evolved to consume and digest some of the

modern foods that factor into a typical menu plan, namely grains and dairy. You don’t have to agree with all the principles of the diet to enjoy many of the recipes, which center on meat and wholesome produce, so you might want to take some inspiration from accomplished paleo chefs while you stick to your gluten-free vow.

Wait It Out

If you do decide to go gluten-free for the good of your psoriasis symptoms, be patient — results can take time to surface. Experts recommend that you stick with your gluten-free diet for at least three months to see if it brings a significant change, at which point you can decide if gluten is really to blame for your psoriasis.

If you’re not sure how much good the dietary adjustment has done your body, you may want to start adding gluten back in at the three-month mark, and track your reaction.