

Is going gluten-free all it s cracked up to be? Not really.

By ACSH Staff — June 24, 2014



The gluten-free craze is going strong, as about one-third of

Americans report trying to avoid gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. Yet, only about two to three million Americans have celiac disease, a medical condition in which the body cannot process the protein. For the rest of the U.S. population, health experts say there are no proven benefits to going gluten-free. However, there are so many health claims out there which may actually serve to bewilder consumers as much as it liberates them,[according to](#) ^[1] an article in the *Wall Street Journal*.

It has only taken a few years for gluten-free products to take hold of the market. Due to improved diagnostic tests for celiac disease, more people became aware of the fact that they needed to avoid gluten. Currently, one can find gluten-free products in every supermarket and according to Nielsen, U.S. sales of products labeled as gluten-free have doubled to \$23 billion in the past year. The label can even be found on products that never contained gluten in the first place such as yogurts and packaged vegetables (reminding us of similar No-Cholesterol ads for carrots and tomatoes).

Food historian, Abigail Carroll compares the gluten-free craze to what happened in the 1970s when the government began to promote the idea of eating less fat. The products developed by food companies at that time may have contained less fat, but they were also higher in sugar and had the same amount of calories as the full fat versions. Ms. Carroll says, Everyone thought they were healthy so people ate more of those foods and ending up gaining weight. Fat consumption went down and obesity rose at the same time in the 1980s.

ACSH s Ariel Savransky had this to say, As [we ve said in](#) ^[2] the past, much of this gluten-free craze is about money and marketing new products to consumers who see the gluten-free label and automatically associate those products with being healthier in some way. The fact is that unless one has a medical condition in which their body cannot process gluten, there is no proven health benefit to going gluten-free. Furthermore, most of the individuals who choose to go gluten-free [do not even know](#) ^[3] what gluten is. Before you choose to embrace a certain way of eating, you should make sure you get the facts so that you can make the most informed decisions for your

health.

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