



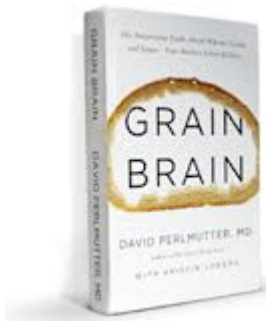
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Going against the grain: Is a gluten free lifestyle for you?

by Wendy L. Cullitan

Chicago Food Health-related products

Troubled by cramping and chronic stomach pain throughout her adulthood,



GRAIN BRAIN
The Surprising Truth About Wheat, Carbs, and Sugar - Your Brain's Silent Killers

Karen Lasky, 51, of Chicago, had grown accustomed to being uncomfortable. Like tens[1] of millions of Americans with gastrointestinal problems—from bloating and indigestion to heartburn and bowel irregularity, she relied on over-the-counter medication for relief.

In 2008, Lasky’s results from an IgG blood test were elevated, indicating gluten intolerance, so she underwent an endoscopy and biopsies to check for celiac disease (CD). Those results



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were negative, but she is gluten intolerant. Gastroenterologists urge people who have digestive issues to consult a doctor before eliminating gluten; otherwise, without gluten in the body, tests can result in false negatives.

Luckily for Lasky, ever since she adopted a gluten free (GF) diet, her stomach problems have essentially vanished. A devoted yoga practitioner before her diagnosis, the change in her diet coupled with her practice allows Lasky to “look comfortably towards the future with more peace and joy.”

Grain brain: lose the carbs

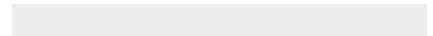
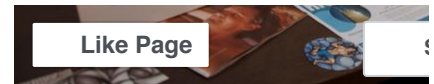
Sales of GF products have nearly tripled since 2008 to \$4.2 billion in 2012.[1][1] Many people are choosing to forgo gluten to improve their health, including Lasky’s friend who told her: “I feel better and am doing my crossword puzzles much faster!”

Renowned neurologist Dr. David Perlmutter demonstrates the validity of the trend in his newly released book “Grain Brain: The surprising truth about wheat, carbs and sugar.” Through peer-reviewed, scientific evidence, he reveals that eating a diet free of gluten and sugar improves digestive well being and heals mild memory problems, often a precursor to Alzheimer’s as well as ADHD, chronic anxiety, diabetes, migraines, insomnia and more.

During our interview, Perlmutter said, “The brain is exquisitely sensitive to diet. Fundamentally, carbohydrates and sugar are the brain’s silent killers, causing loss of brain tissue. To ascribe to this diet, people must disregard two dated myths: that a low-fat, high-carb diet is good and cholesterol is bad. The brain’s real lover is fat and when people consume too many carbs, they eat less fat—the very ingredient that the brain needs for optimal health.”[2]



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Perlmutter's program is a high-fat and low-carb diet coupled with adequate sleep and regular exercise. Adopting the regimen transformed teenager Nicole Sina's life. Sina told me that she noticed small twitches in her fingers that eventually travelled up her arm and shoulder, making writing difficult. After it moved to her leg, she often tripped. Finally, she endured embarrassing facial muscle spasms that impaired her speech.

Following a misdiagnosis of Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS), Sina contacted Perlmutter and he identified her condition as dystonia, a neurological movement disorder. Four months into Perlmutter's regimen, Sina reports, "I don't twitch at all and I believe everything has to do with the diet. I can write, speak and walk normally once again."

Celiac disease—what about me?

Unfortunately, many people with celiac are unaware that they have the disease. According to the University of Maryland Center for Celiac Research, untreated celiac disease (CD) can lead to complications including pancreatic disease, gynecological disorders and increased risk for certain cancers.

"Formally diagnosing celiac disease generally requires a small bowel biopsy," confirmed Perlmutter. "Genetic testing, looking for the HLA DQ2 or DQ8 markers is also helpful."

One Wilmette couple that I spoke with has twin daughters, each diagnosed with CD. While both girls, age 14, follow a GF diet, one remains asymptomatic and the other feels 100% better now that her chronic heartburn has dissipated. Neither parent has CD, demonstrating that one can have a genetic predisposition to the disease but CD is not a destiny.

Celiac disease and allergies



After a Chicago mother of three and yoga practitioner was diagnosed with CD, she had her youngest son tested because he had the same rash and his teeth were missing enamel—common in children with CD. The endoscopy indicated a second autoimmune disease that causes a reaction in his esophagus to 50 foods (including gluten). Doctors recommended he ingest or use a feeding tube for a commercially made liquid. She said, “No, I can craft a ‘safe’ diet for him.” Now, she reports that with his non-commercial, non-processed restricted diet, her son is in remission, has grown and plays tournament tennis.

This mother remains frustrated that gluten allergy, intolerance and celiac disease (CD) are used synonymously because they are different. Perlmutter added, “Gluten sensitivity represents the body’s inflammatory response to a foreign protein as opposed to the induction of a reaction against ‘self,’ which characterizes celiac disease and other autoimmune conditions.”

This mother also believes that the newly established FDA law for GF labeling isn’t stringent enough for those with CD. “I need assurance that the ‘GF’ food was not produced on the same line used to make foods that contain gluten. If it was, are ‘good manufacturing practices used’—cleaning and sanitizing between runs? The law does not cover this,” she said.

Beginning each morning with meditation and yoga supports her to spend the rest of the day researching, calling companies and preparing meals for her son.

CD and beyond: gluten sensitivity casts a wide net

While more than 2 million people in the United States have CD (National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse), research conducted by Dr. Alessio Fasano, Director of the University of Maryland Center for Celiac Research, shows that



gluten sensitivity differs from celiac and could effect up to 20 million people in the U.S.; common symptoms include headaches, rashes, digestive problems and “brain fog.”[2] Countless others may have CD with no painful symptoms, leaving them at risk for future health problems.

Medical experts agree that this phenomenon is due in part to the drastic change in Americans’ dietary choices. Perlmutter said, “Today’s diet is counter to our evolutionary needs—the typical low-fat, high-carb diet is relatively new from a historical standpoint. Our ancestors 250,000 years ago relied heavily on a high-protein, low-carb diet for survival. It wasn’t until about 10,000 years ago that wheat was introduced. The quality of our wheat has decreased significantly during the past 50 years due to increased processing coupled with an enormous upsurge in the amount of gluten in food, which makes bread softer and pizza dough flaky.”

Chicago preschool teacher Debra Wechter, 55, stopped eating gluten five years ago when she suffered from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS). A nutritionist put Wechter on an elimination diet to determine what foods she should avoid. Gluten topped the list. Recently, she underwent an endoscopy and a biopsy revealed that her GF diet resulted in unreliable test results because gluten must be in the body to prove the presence of CD.

“At this point, it doesn’t matter whether I know if I have celiac or not. I feel better without gluten. My life and symptoms are much more manageable now,” she commented.

When symptoms occasionally surface, Wechter drinks ginger ale, uses a heating pad and takes baths to help calm her body and mind. And when she asks her husband: “What did I eat that made me uncomfortable?” he jokes that it’s not what I ate, but that I ate at all!”



It's not just the food: exercise and sleep are key

“Both sleep and exercise are important epigenetic (resulting from environmental rather than genetic influences) players that are part of the foundation of my regimen. This is a lifestyle change where the brain is fed well via diet, exercise and sleep. Sleep interruption causes changes in hormone levels and doesn't allow the brain time enough to refuel. In addition, lack of sleep stimulates hunger, makes people crave carbohydrates and gain weight,” said Perlmutter whose book explains the facts supporting his theories, lays the groundwork to shift to his plan, provides meal plans and recipes as well as information about how to incorporate proper sleep and exercise into one's daily life.

Yoga practitioner Lasky concludes: “As an adult, I have led a healthy lifestyle and yoga keeps me centered and sane. If I miss yoga, my body, my brain and my husband feel it! Now that I am gluten free, I benefit even more from the center and calm I cultivate in class.”

To be or not to be gluten free?

If chronic stomach pain disrupts your daily life, or you have other ailments as highlighted in Perlmutter's book, a GF diet may be for you. Before making any changes, he recommends speaking with your internist first, who may refer you to a specialist, to see how removing gluten from your diet might be beneficial.

With the advance of 21st century medicine, we now know more and more about how diet affects health, well being and longevity. The publication of David Perlmutter's “Grain Brain: The surprising truth about wheat, carbs and sugar” adds to the arsenal of mounting scientific evidence available for one to make an informed decision about what is in their best interest.



Sidenotes: “The best news of all is that as soon as you shift your body’s metabolism from relying on carbs to relying on fat and protein, you’ll find a lot of desirable goals easier to achieve, such as losing weight effortlessly and permanently gaining more energy throughout the day, sleeping better, being more creative and productive, having a sharper memory and faster brain and enjoying a better sex life.” —David Perlmutter, M.D. (“Grain Brain,” p. 36)

Editor’s Note: Early September, writer Wendy Cullitan and her husband, Tim, who is gluten sensitive, embarked on Dr. Perlmutter’s program. Already healthy eaters who tried to avoid gluten and excess sugar, the couple report having more energy and less hunger throughout the day. Wendy sleeps better (unless she is on deadline) and Tim has lost weight. Adhering to Perlmutter’s 90/10 rule, when the holidays rolled around, Wendy treated herself to homemade gingerbread cookies and Tim enjoyed mashed potatoes and gravy.

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1. [1]National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. **Opportunities and Challenges in Digestive Diseases Research: Recommendations of the National Commission on Digestive Diseases**. Bethesda, MD: National Institutes of Health; 2009. NIH Publication 08–6514.

[1] Huffington Post, “Gluten-Free Foods Market To Hit \$4.2 Billion This Year: Report,” October 22, 2012

[2] Fasano A. et. al. “Divergence of gut permeability and mucosal immune gene expression in two gluten associated conditions: celiac disease and gluten sensitivity,” *BMC Medicine* 2011, 9:23.



Wendy L. Cullitan, principal of Wordsmith Communications, is an award-winning writer, editor and marketing consultant. She graduated from Barnard College of Columbia University.

Wendy finds balance in her life through an avid yoga practice that began in 1995. Her personal self-discovery prompted her to become a yoga teacher in order to share this meaningful, life-affirming practice with others. Wendy loves spending time upside down — which is why you will find her in a headstand or handstand every day. She is inspired by the love of her family, walks on the beach, traveling and journaling.

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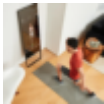
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