

## Gluten

### **What is gluten, and why is it a problem?**

Gluten is a type of protein found in wheat, barley, oats and rye. It is the gluey, expansive part of the grain and is why these grains are traditionally used for breads and thickening sauces. Wheat contains the most gluten, as it is the most selectively bred of all the grains. Over the years farmers have cultivated wheat varieties to have higher gluten contents, to help the bread making process.

An increasing number of people have difficulty digesting gluten, and choose to cut out either just wheat, or all gluten-containing grains from their diet.

### **Coeliac disease and gluten sensitivities**

Some people have a genetic predisposition to gluten intolerance, a condition known as coeliac disease. This is thought to affect one in every 100 people in Europe. Not everyone with the predisposition will develop symptoms, but these can include anything from mal-absorption of food, fatigue and immune weakness to an increased risk of osteoporosis, cancer and a shorter life expectancy. The presentation of the condition can be very vague, and it may go undiagnosed for years. Due to its prevalence and potential severity some authorities are calling for routine screening in children. The condition cannot be cured but it can be managed effectively through a gluten-free diet.

There are also many people who, while they may not have coeliac disease, feel healthier by avoiding either just wheat or all gluten grains. Our diets can easily contain high levels of gluten at every meal, and this constant exposure can trigger sensitivity, causing headaches, fatigue, depression and digestive problems, as well as aggravating other conditions such as eczema, psoriasis and arthritis.

### **Wheat free and gluten free foods**

As the name suggests, wheat free foods do not contain wheat, but may still contain gluten. Gluten free foods however will not contain wheat, barley, oats or rye.

Avoiding wheat or gluten is not as easy as merely avoiding it in breads, pastas and biscuits. Wheat in particular is a very common ingredient in soups, sausages, sauces, stock cubes, breakfast cereals and many convenience foods. A gluten free diet can be challenging, especially when eating out.

There are now very good gluten or wheat free products on the market, many of which we sell, including different types of pasta, breads, cakes and biscuits as well as cereals and stock cubes. Have a look for Paul's breads, Orgran pastas, or The Village Bakery who produce a wide range of gluten-free cakes, biscuits and bars.

## **PLANET ORGANIC**

### **Spelt, kamut and buckwheat**

Both spelt and kamut are ancient wheat varieties, closer to wheat as a wild grass, and have a different nutritional make up to modern, very hybridized wheat. They still contain gluten, so are not suitable for celiac sufferers or anyone on a strict gluten free diet, but many people who are intolerant of wheat find they can eat spelt and kamut, due to their lower gluten content. Buckwheat, confusingly, is not related to wheat at all, and is gluten free. It is frequently used in gluten free pastas, and makes very good savoury pancakes.

### **What are the options?**

There are many alternatives to wheat, barley, oats and rye, which can be used to make substitute products such as pastas or just for adding variety to your diet. The lesser-known grains are ideal for anyone who wants a less wheat focused diet, as well as greater nutritional variety to their food. These alternatives include:

- Rice, rice flour, rice pasta, rice cakes and crackers, rice bread
- Corn, corn flour, corn pasta, corn flakes, polenta, corn chips and tortilla
- Millet, millet flour
- Tapioca and tapioca flour
- Potato flour, crisps
- Amaranth, amaranth puffs, amaranth flour, amaranth cookies
- Buckwheat, buckwheat flour, buckwheat pasta, buckwheat pancakes
- Quinoa, quinoa flour, quinoa puffs, quinoa pasta
- Kudzu or arrowroot for thickening sauces

### **Can I eat breads made from sprouted grains?**

It depends – there is still some gluten in sprouted bread but because it is broken down by the sprouting process some people can tolerate it.

### **Can I drink wheat grass juice?**

Yes. There is no gluten in wheat or barley grasses, only in the dormant seeds.

### **Is there anything else that can help?**

Yes. There is a digestive enzyme called glutenzyme, which can be taken as a supplement at the same time as a gluten containing meal to aid digestion. Probiotic bacteria such as acidophilus can help gut health, and are very important to help us digest food properly, and glutamine, an amino acid, can heal lesions in the gut lining caused by a gluten allergy.