Gluten and Asthma: Should You Go Gluten-Free?

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Gluten and Asthma

If your symptoms of asthma are severe, undoubtedly you are searching for the best asthma treatment, especially when you know there is no cure.

You may have tried to eliminate certain things from your life to reduce your symptoms, such as avoiding exposure to specific allergens, like dust and certain pollens. Maybe this is not enough though.

Perhaps you have considered eliminating gluten from your diet.

The question is – is this a good idea?

Is There a Connection Between Asthma and Gluten?

According to the Gluten Free Society, the number of people who suffer from both asthma and gluten intolerance continues to grow in the U.S.

Are gluten and asthma connected in some way? In 2011, the Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology reported that there might be a correlation.

For example, bakers seem to have an increased risk of asthma, and this has been reported as early as 1700. Bakers breathe in flour, and it has been shown that this causes an IgE response – this reaction triggers the immune system to produce histamine, which causes asthma symptoms, along with other allergy symptoms.

In fact, there is an estimated 20 million cases of asthma, 30 million cases of gluten sensitivity and 1 million cases of celiac disease. Is it prudent to advise people with asthma to avoid gluten?

Should You Go Gluten-Free?

With statistics this alarming, it makes you wonder – should you go gluten-free?

Well, not so fast! According to the American College of Allergy, Asthma & Immunology, the symptoms of a wheat allergy include hives or a skin rash, GI upset, stuffy or a runny nose, sneezing, headaches, asthma and anaphylaxis. Triggers, of course, are foods that contain wheat, and avoidance of these foods is paramount.

Sometimes, a wheat allergy is definitive. For example, you erupt in hives immediately after eating a slice of bread. Alternatively, you have anaphylaxis after eating a bowl of pasta. However, when the symptoms are much more vague, such as a stuffy nose and allergy symptoms, a diagnosis can be tricky. Is it from other foods or the environment?

In these cases, your physician will likely want to be made. Here's how a wheat allergy is diagnosed:

- **Skin-prick test:** A small amount of the allergens are placed on the back of the forearm, which is pricked using a probe, which allows the allergen to seep directly under the skin. If a reaction occurs in 15 to 20 minutes, an allergy diagnosis can be made.
- **Blood test:** A blood test is sent to a laboratory and is tested for the presence of IgE antibodies to the wheat protein.
- **Oral food challenge:** Small amounts of the suspecting food are eaten to see if a reaction develops. This is performed in a physician's office due to the possibility of an allergic reaction.

If a diagnosis of a wheat allergy is made, avoiding wheat is indicated, and if the wheat allergy is diagnosed, then you should avoid gluten.

Wheat Allergy vs. Gluten Intolerance

There is a difference between a wheat allergy and a gluten intolerance.

- A wheat allergy is a real histamine response to the offending protein that can be diagnosed by a physician.
- A gluten allergy is celiac disease, which is a gastrointestinal disease. This is an autoimmune disease and is serious – they cannot and should not eat wheat, whatsoever.
- A gluten intolerance is not considered an allergy, but many people will say they are allergic to it.

So, What's the Verdict?

Consuming gluten itself is not harmful to asthma patients. However, if someone who has asthma also has celiac disease, gluten should be avoided at all costs. Not only can consuming gluten cause a moderate or severe allergic reaction, but it can put stress on the body too. In turn, this can worsen asthma symptoms, as stress is a trigger to asthma flare-ups.

If you have celiac disease and asthma, here are some things you should eat to make a gluten-free diet:

- Quinoa.
- Brown rice.
- Oats.
- Oranges.
- Grapefruit.
- Apples.
- Bananas.
- Pears.
- Mushrooms.
- Radishes.
- Legumes.
- Read meat.
- Seafood.
- Chicken.
- Milk.
- Cheese.
- Cottage cheese.
- Olive oil.
- Avocado oil.
- Coffee.
- Tea.

However, just because certain dairy or meat products are gluten-free does not mean that all are. Be sure to read

food labels and talk to your doctor and/or dietician about foods to avoid.

The Bottom Line…

Most specialists agree that limiting gluten from your diet is not indicated unless it is medically necessary. While your asthma may be linked to a wheat allergy, you must speak with your physician to obtain a diagnosis.