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Gluten Sensitivity

If you have lived long enough, you can observe different ‘trends’ in all areas of human endeavors. In the healing arts, these trends include the emergence of ‘alternative healing’ to ‘complementary healing’ to ‘new age’ healing. Remember Epstein –Barr virus, how about toxic shock syndrome, or chronic fatigue, or fibromyalgia? How about ADD or autism? This trend type response is important to consider. What it means is that more and more people are taking a look at, or considering treatment for groups of symptoms from all corners of the healing arts. Gluten Sensitivity appears to be such a problem. Now it appears that gluten sensitivity may be a genetic disorder that has been associated with Celiac Disease aka Sprue. In a number of people, the immune response to the protein called gluten may actually run in a spectrum. At one end, are the people who are highly reactive to it with certain clear reactions. At the other end, are people who have a significantly reduced reaction to this protein.

Gluten is a protein found in wheat and its relatives, including spelt, faro, triticale, barley and rye. Oats contain a biologically close protein and people with these sensitivities can be affected by them. Wheat is one of the most common items in our food supply. It is also a hidden ingredient in soup, gravy, snack foods, even baked beans and some spices like mustards. What happens in cases of sensitivity is that your intestines (gut) becomes damaged and allows proteins to ‘leak’ through the walls of the intestines into the blood stream before they are completely broken down. Unfortunately, this may create more problems by developing other types of allergies. These could include eggs, soy, dairy, and cane sugar. (Remember Lactose Intolerance)?

So...It seems that in some of us, there is an immune response to the proteins of wheat, rye and barley. This response appears to be mediated by certain genes. If you carry more than a few of them, you would probably have a more severe reaction to foods containing these proteins. Those reactions would be nausea, vomiting, and intestinal bleeding and could descend down the scale to chronic constipation, diarrhea, abdominal bloating and painful urination. Many people have had a diagnosis of Interstitial Cystitis, which is really painful and frequent urination. Many of these cases may really be your body’s response to the inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract. There are also other conditions whose symptoms may be perceived as a separate ‘disease’ when it is simply a case of your body trying to ‘clear’ the ‘toxic’ proteins. This could include Irritable Bowel Syndrome, and prostatitis in men. There are also nervous system manifestations of this disease that can cause dizziness, mental confusion and weakness.

Sometimes this problem of gluten sensitivity is found with other ‘fringe’ conditions like fibromyalgia. The resulting symptoms are often baffling for doctors to systematize and this failure to recognize the true nature of the problem create despondence on the part of the patients. Typically, they run from doctor to doctor only to be told once again “It’s all in your head”.

There are some lab tests that can point the way towards gluten sensitivity. They are immune system tests. Most doctors can order them. The genetic testing is very expensive, but the immune testing is more reasonable.

How do we go about getting out of this problem when it seems that gluten is in everything?

Here is a practical solution for getting out of the gluten game. Quit eating it. That is obviously going to be harder than you thought, but it is not insurmountable. I am recommending the following websites for help in sifting through what is the best way to start. I personally like the www.wellbladder.com site, and also recommend www.glutenfreechoice.com; www.gluten.net and www.celiac.com. If you go onto Amazon, there are hundreds of books. I have heard that “Living Gluten Free for Dummies” by Dana Korn and ‘The G-Free Diet –A Gluten Free Survival Guide by Elizabeth Hasselbeck are good primary sources.

I would encourage you to speak to me about this if you have questions. You can also try talking to your PCP, but for heavens sakes, at least talk to someone who is licensed and insured. You would probably do that prior to a major home repair or renovation wouldn’t you? Well, we’re talking about your health and your life here. So act accordingly.