

Gluten-Free in a Gluten-Filled World

- Ginny Naughton

My mom was diagnosed with celiac disease, a genetic gluten allergy, around the time school began. As a necessary precaution, we emptied the house of all wheat products. Goodbye loaf of bread, cereal, pasta. Ciao tortilla shells, you surprising carriers of gluten! All items containing wheat or potentially cross contaminated went out the window. Ridding the house of crackers and Oreos was, of course, only the tip of the iceberg.

Celiac disease is hereditary. While my sisters and I were asked to hold off on dear, precious gluten until our tests, it didn't help that I was starting to demonstrate celiac symptoms and the request of going gluten-free had become full on necessity. By now, my mom and I have been (mostly) wheatless for a month and a half. For anyone interested in joining the new "health" movement of ditching gluten, or anyone simply curious, this is what it's really like to survive in a world dominated by something you can never eat.

1. The smell of brownies is intoxicating. In fact, the sweet aroma of those gooey, chocolate delights is almost as irresistible as the scent of bacon... especially if you can't have them. Pro tip: Never, ever be present when your friends are baking them lest you wish to face the greatest temptation (and subsequent illness) you've ever experienced.

2. The above applies to pizza as well. Some places will make gluten free pizzas upon request; however, there's often no buying by the slice. If you're planning on going gluten free, your squad's after school Vesuvius stops will no longer be joyful but rather filled with the deepest of envies. Pro tip: there's no gluten in the cheese that falls off your friends' slices (of heaven), so feel free to snatch some from your family.

3. You will have to pack food in the occurrence of a sleepover or extended stay with your friends. Dinners made by us teenagers usually involve noodles or pizza, so bring gluten free Annie's mac and cheese that's light and quick to make. Breakfast foods are notorious for being baking and wheat related, so bring one or two Kind bars and hope you can make eggs in the morning on your friend's stove. Pro tip: when in doubt, hit up Dunks and grab a hefty coffee. Filling, delicious, cheap, and no gluten.

4. It's extremely difficult to find replacement products like gluten-free bread, cookies, etc. After much trial and error, my family has found plenty of great replacements and substitutes. For example, we discovered an amazing gluten-free scone mix, and they're little fluffy clouds of breakfast perfection (especially when you put honey on them). Pro-tip: Most of the breads are found in the freezer aisle. I heartily suggest Glutino brand.

5. The gluten-free diet is not just giving up bagels and cake. I can't have soy sauce or gravy. Most fried foods are cross-contaminated, so are off the list. If you're embarking into this lifestyle for non-medical reasons, consider yourself lucky that you don't have to read nutrition labels for any and everything as my mom is required.

6. It also has a reputation in the internet health community for being some kind of miracle diet. Of course, it's really only a Miracle Worker™ if you have a gluten intolerance or allergy. If you do, it can improve mood, energy, skin issues, and more. If not, it truly won't make a difference, so be thoughtful before you join the fad. It's much harder than it seems.