

From the Nutritionist

Andrea Hart, RDN, CDN



The Facts About Gluten

Gluten. A decade ago, few Americans had heard of it. These days, you’ve probably not only heard of it, you or someone you know has tried going “gluten free.” While it’s true that some people must avoid gluten, there is a lot of misinformation surrounding the topic and many people avoid gluten unnecessarily.

If you do need to avoid gluten, ASC makes it easy for you to identify foods which you should or shouldn’t eat. The GF symbol on our menu boards indicates foods that are “Gluten Friendly,” which means that they were made from ingredients that do not contain gluten. Also, both The Bistro and Neubig have an Allergy Awareness Area where you can find a variety of packaged and pre-made foods without gluten. Here are some facts that can help you decide if you might need to avoid gluten:

- Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. It is also a “hidden” ingredient in many processed foods, such as beer, soy sauce, salad dressings and flavored chips.
- Gluten is not inherently unhealthy. It is found in many healthy foods and is not harmful for most people.
- People diagnosed with celiac disease must avoid gluten. Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder in which the body’s immune system reacts to gluten in the body by damaging the small intestine and causing a host of other medical issues.
- It is currently estimated that about 1% of the population has celiac disease. There is no medication or treatment for celiac disease other than a lifelong, strict, gluten-free diet.
- About 6% of the population is believed to have gluten sensitivity — they test negative for celiac disease but have symptoms from eating gluten.
- If you think you have celiac disease, it is important to be tested before going on a gluten-free diet, or the test won’t be accurate.
- Unless you have celiac disease or a true gluten sensitivity, going “gluten free” will not give you any health benefits.
- Gluten free doesn’t mean “low calorie” or “healthy.” Processed gluten-free foods can have more calories, fat and sugar than similar gluten-containing foods.
- People that do lose weight on a gluten-free diet are likely doing so because of other diet or lifestyle changes, like eating more fruits and vegetables, eating less junk food, or being more active — not because of avoiding gluten.

Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York state-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.