

From the Nutritionist

Andrea Hart, RDN, CDN



A decade ago, few Americans had heard of gluten, but these days, chances are you've not only heard of it, you or someone you know has tried going "gluten free." And it's no wonder. Based on all the media hype, one could think that giving up gluten would solve all of their health and weight issues.

While it's true that some people must avoid gluten, there is a lot of misinformation surrounding this topic. In honor of Celiac Awareness Day on Sept. 13, I'd like to share some facts about gluten and celiac disease.

- 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 the disease other than a lifelong, strict gluten-free diet.
- 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.
- About 6% of the population is believed to have gluten sensitivity — they test negative for celiac disease but have symptoms from eating gluten.
- Unless you have celiac disease or 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 who do lose weight on a gluten-free diet are likely losing weight 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.

If you need to avoid gluten, ASC makes it easy for you to identify foods that you should or shouldn't eat. The "GF" symbol on our menu boards indicates foods that were made from ingredients that do not contain gluten. Also, Neubig Dining Hall (and starting in January, The Bistro Off Broadway as well) is home to the Allergy Awareness Zone, where you can find a variety of foods to meet your needs.

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.

Contact Andrea: andrea.hart@cortland.edu or call 607-753-5773 with questions or to set up an appointment. Or stop by her office, first floor, Neubig Hall, across from the Neubig Dining cashier.