

Going gluten-free: Is the diet a good fit for everyone?

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(Medical Xpress) -- One of the latest trends in the food market and among celebrities is going gluten-free. Snack giant Frito-Lay has announced it will introduce new gluten-free labels and products, and Miley Cyrus has credited her recent weight loss to a gluten-free diet.

Experts at Kansas State University say going gluten-free may be a good choice for some individuals, but that just because a product's label says it's gluten-free doesn't mean that it's healthy.

Going gluten-free was an obvious choice for Kathryn Deschenes, a Kansas State University master's student in food science from Ellsworth. She has celiac disease, which runs in her family. The disease is a digestive disorder triggered by eating gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. Those with celiac disease often experience symptoms like nausea and diarrhea.

"It can have funny symptoms like depression, [acid reflux](#) and it can stunt children's growth," Deschenes said.

For the 1 percent of the population with celiac disease, giving up gluten products usually takes away those symptoms. Deschenes went gluten-free in high school and likes the recent gluten-free trend.

"It's been beneficial for the market," she said, adding that it means more companies are producing gluten-free products and labeling their products as such.

But are products labeled "gluten-free" healthier?

Take a good hard look at those labels, recommends Mark Haub, associate professor and interim head of Kansas State University's department of [human nutrition](#) in the College of Human Ecology. Haub studies [whole grains](#) and dietary fiber.

"Just because a product says it's gluten-free doesn't mean it's healthy," he said.

The gluten-free product likely contains as many calories as gluten options, Haub said, because a gram of sorghum, corn or rice flour appears to be metabolically similar to a gram of [wheat flour](#).

Haub said that gluten isn't bad for the average person.

"People have been eating wheat, rye and barley for thousands of years, and there are people who live to be 100 who eat wheat [products](#) and don't seem to exhibit any types of health issues," he said.

Gluten-free diets are now being adopted by people without [celiac disease](#). Haub said as long as they do their research about the diet, he's fine with the trend.

"I'm totally supportive of people selecting and choosing lifestyle habits that best suit their needs and preferences, and this would fit that category," he said.

If someone eats more varieties of vegetables and fruits and engages in portion control of other foods, then this type of gluten-free living may elicit health benefits, he said.

Deschenes cautions that gluten-free is not necessarily a weight-loss

program and can be a bad diet if you aren't aware of the things it lacks, such as a sufficient amount of fiber.

To help add more fiber to her diet, Deschenes buys breads with more fiber. She also said you can add flax seed to your [diet](#), which is high in fiber.

Provided by Kansas State University

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