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Market grows for gluten-free foods

By **GLENN EVANS**
 Wednesday, September 02, 2009

The world of food is opening a little wider for people who are sensitive to a key component of wheat, rye and barley.

Gluten-free foods have been on grocery shelves for years but in relative obscurity. People suffering from gluten sensitivity, or full-blown celiac disease, have had to find the specialty area or scrutinize the list of ingredients to find something that won't irritate their chronic condition.





Kevin Green/News-Journal Photo (ENLARGE)

Gluten-free breakfast bars are available on the gluten-free aisle of Vitamins Plus inside Drug Emporium on West Loop 281 in Longview.

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yes. We have a large number of people come in for that," said Nancy Worthen, co-owner of Granary Street health food shop in Longview. "(Celiac disease) is something that a lot of people have these days."

Pasta, flour, snack foods and chips all come in gluten-free varieties, Worthen said. Often, rice is used as a substitute in pastas and other grain-based foods.

Worthen also said manufacturers are moving the gluten-free notice from the small print to the fronts of labels.

"You don't have trouble finding it now," she said. "Since it's such a prevalent problem, they're emphasizing it on the package."

Nancy Kloberdanz, office manager for the Gluten Intolerance Group of North America, said celiac disease scrapes away the cilia that help food move along the small intestine.

"We refer to it as, you have shag carpet when everything is going good and you're feeling well, and celiac disease is like linoleum," she said.

Kloberdanz said the medical community is diagnosing more people with the condition. Other people sort of diagnose themselves, noting the bloating and gas associated with gluten sensitivity.

Still, other people are gluten sensitive, often called wheat sensitivity.

"Some of our major companies, like Betty Crocker, have some recipes that do not have gluten," Kloberdanz said. "General Mills has a cereal. So, they are recognizing that there is a need."

Ron Lodata Sr., vice president of Caesar's Pasta, which produces gluten-free pastas, agreed that food providers are hearing a call from consumers.

His New Jersey-based family business was

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steered into the no-gluten game by his brother, Michael, who has a wheat sensitivity.

"We're finding that a lot of people had or have gastro-intestinal disturbances, and it was very hard to pinpoint what it was," Lodata Sr. said. "Now, it's easier to diagnose, and they are diagnosing it for more and more people."

The market is responding.

"The retailers are starting to designate a certain area and calling it a gluten-free area," he said.

"On the labeling, as manufacturers, we're putting it on there because we purposefully developed this product gluten free."

Vitamins Plus, the grocery inside Drug Emporium on West Loop 281, has one aisle that's exclusively gluten free.

There also are gluten-free salad dressings, cake mixes and other items scattered among the shelves.

That latter set-up is the case at health food store Granary Street, where Worthen reports an increase in requests for gluten-free foods.

Sharon Burgoyne, a registered dietitian at Good Shepherd Medical Center's Institute for Healthy Living, stressed that people should seek a professional, medical diagnosis if they suspect they are gluten sensitive.

"If you can tolerate gluten, there's really no reason to choose gluten-free products," Burgoyne said. She added, though, that the gluten-free products won't harm a diet, either.

We're a nation of gluten gluttons, it seems. Gluten is a protein in modified food starch, and hydrolyzed vegetable or wheat protein, she said.

"Gluten is found in a lot of other products, like processed foods," Burgoyne said. "The more processed the food is, the more likely you're going to see gluten in those products, because it's cheap."

Kloberdanz predicted gluten-free foods are here to stay.

"The market is growing," she said. "Some people still think it's a fad market, like the latest thing to do. ... Some people are doing it because it's an absolute need. Others are doing it because they feel better."

* * *

Primer

Celiac disease, or gluten sensitivity, occurs when the protein known as gluten attacks the cilia of the small intestine. Cilia are the hairlike strands that help nutrients move along the small intestine. It is an inherited, autoimmune disorder.

Symptoms

Celiac disease may appear at any time in a person's life. The disease can be triggered for the first time after surgery, viral infection, severe emotional stress, pregnancy or childbirth. CD is a multi-system, multi-symptom disorder. Celiac disease symptoms are extremely varied, can often mimic other bowel disorders and are not always gastrointestinal.

- **Source:** *Center for Disease Control and Prevention*

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Featherlite gluten-free biscuits

1 cup rice flour

1 cup cornstarch

1 cup tapioca starch/flour

1 tablespoon potato flour

Mix these flour formulas in the proportions given and use them to substitute cup for cup for all-purpose wheat flour.

Makes 3 cups.

Cheese blintzes

Crepe

1 cup gluten free flour blend

1 cup milk

Dash of salt

4 whole eggs

1 tablespoon oil

Cheese filling

1 pound farmer cheese

1/2 cup sugar

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1 teaspoon vanilla sugar

3/4 tablespoon lemon juice

1/2 cup vanilla yogurt

Blend all crepe ingredients until smooth. Pour desired amount into hot, slightly greased small frying pan. Tilt pan gently in all directions to get crepe batter evenly distributed in pan. Cook on medium flame.

When bottom is lightly golden, turn over crepe for reverse side to get done. Remove from pan and let cool. Repeat, until mixture is finished.

Mix all cheese filling ingredients with fork until smooth. Drop a tablespoon full of filling in center of each crepe. Smooth and flatten filling till 3/4 inch away from end of crepe. Bend in about 1 inch of right and left ends from crepe toward center. Roll bottom of crepe to top, to form blintz.

Makes 4 blintzes.

- **Source:** *Gluten Intolerance Group of North America*

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