

The Effects of a Gluten-free Lifestyle on Your Oral Health

By Maggie Blood

What people with celiac disease, wheat allergies and gluten sensitivities need to know



Maintaining a good oral health-care routine that your dentist would be proud of can be a little challenging for most of us, but it can be even more trying for people with health issues, specifically, celiac disease (CD). According to the Canadian Celiac Association, the autoimmune disorder affects about one in 1,000 people in Canada and can cause more than just digestive discomfort for people who have it.¹

The condition causes the small intestine to be damaged by gluten, making it harder to digest certain foods and absorb critical nutrients. In order to combat these issues, people with CD eliminate wheat, rye and barley from their diets. While celiac disease, wheat allergies and gluten sensitivities are actual conditions, gluten-free eating has become a lifestyle choice for many people without any medical reason to do it. Yet, research is suggesting that may not be healthy,

especially when no planning is done to find suitable food alternatives.²

Because of the popularity of the gluten-free diet in Western culture, many food manufacturers now offer gluten-free products that can be found in grocery stores nationwide. The problem for anyone eating a gluten-free diet is that those foods, baked goods in particular, can be highly processed, loaded with sugar and lacking in nutrients. Anyone on a gluten-free diet is in danger of falling short on proper levels of fibre, iron, folate, niacin, thiamine, calcium, vitamin B12, phosphorus and zinc. According to Registered Dietitian Katherine Tallmadge, author of *Diet Simple: 195 Mental Tricks, Substitutions, Habits & Inspirations* (LifeLine Press, 2011), People who unnecessarily shun gluten may do so at the expense of their health.³



So what does this do to the mouth? These nutrients are essential for developing and maintaining healthy bones and teeth. While celiac disease can develop at any age, if it occurs in children younger than seven, when permanent teeth are developing, there can be defects to the dental enamel.⁴



Ontario Dental Association Past-President Dr. LouAnn Visconti, who maintains an orthodontic practice in Timmins, comments that “the number of teeth affected is also strongly linked to factors that include the age when a gluten-free diet is started.”

There is also oral health research from the Celiac Disease Foundation suggesting that children with celiac disease may be at a higher risk of getting cavities.⁵ According to Dr. Visconti, this may be related to being unable to fully absorb calcium and other key minerals. “Another issue that can affect dental health is recurring canker sores and a dry or burning sensation on the tongue because of difficulties absorbing vitamin B12, folate and iron,” says Dr. Visconti.



Being aware of the nutritional value in what you eat is critical when on a gluten-free diet, and so is maintaining good oral health-care habits. Brushing twice a day and flossing daily are musts. Just keep in mind there are some toothpastes, mouthwashes and even floss that can contain gluten, so be sure to read the labels! [yoh](#)

Gluten in the Dental Office

Ontario Dental Association Past-President Dr. LouAnn Visconti says that “most people don’t realize the dental office has supplies that may contain gluten.” If you or a loved one has celiac disease, it’s important to be aware of this before your next visit to the dentist. And of course, if you have any questions, please ask your dentist. Gluten may be found in some dental products, including:

- gloves
- paste used to polish teeth
- fluoride
- topical local anesthetic
- orthodontic retainers.

For a complete list of dental products that are gluten-free, including polishing pastes, fluoride varnishes, whitening strips and toothpastes, please visit this link on the Celiac Disease Foundation’s website: <https://celiac.org/about-celiac-disease/related-conditions/oral-health/>.

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