

The facts about wheat and your diet

What's good about wheat

Wheat is an essential part of a healthy balanced diet. It is used in all sorts of foods from cereals to soups but it is mostly consumed in bread, whether it is white, brown or wholemeal.

- ▶ Wheat contains high levels of complex carbohydrate, which helps keep energy levels high.
- ▶ High fibre foods such as wholemeal bread can help maintain a healthy weight because they make you feel full and you'll be less likely to snack. Fibre also keeps the digestive system healthy and may help protect against some cancers.
- ▶ Protein makes up between 10-12% of wheat flour. This is essential for the growth, maintenance and repair of the body.
- ▶ By law white and brown flour is fortified with calcium, iron plus the B vitamins, thiamin and niacin. Four medium slices of white bread provide 236mg of calcium which is a quarter of the recommended daily calcium intake for adults (800mg).
- ▶ Wholegrain breads can help reduce the risk of illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, certain types of cancer and type 2 diabetes. We should eat at least 48g of wholegrains daily which is basically three 16g portions. You can easily achieve a 16g portion with 1 medium slice of wholemeal bread or 2 wholemeal pitta bread.



How do you tell if your diet is making you ill?

Key people to visit...

There is a huge variety of therapists and clinicians who will be happy to advise you on your diet – but only a handful are qualified in nutrition and dietetics.

► Your GP

If you think your diet could be making you ill, discuss your symptoms with your GP, who can make a proper diagnosis and carry out blood or skin tests. They should also be able to give you advice on making safe changes to your diet.

► Nurse

Nurses have basic training in nutrition but they are not qualified to diagnose food allergies. They can give you advice on healthy eating and safe ways to control your diet.

► Health Visitor

Health Visitors are also trained in basic nutrition and can give you advice on healthy eating. They are not qualified to diagnose allergies.

► Nutritionist

Nutritionists have a detailed understanding of how what you eat can affect your health. Look out for the letters **RNutr (Registered Nutritionist) or RPHNutr (Registered Public Health Nutritionist)** after their name, which symbolises that they are registered by the Nutrition Society. Registered members require a degree level qualification in nutrition (or closely related subject) plus a minimum of 3 years experience as a nutritionist. They may be able to give you general advice but unless medically qualified, will not be able to give you a diagnosis of a food allergy.



► Dietitian

Qualified dietitians are trained to give practical nutrition advice to individuals and they are best placed to help construct a diet suited to your specific needs and goals.

Avoiding pitfalls

With so much advice out there, how do you know what to believe? We are bombarded with a mass of information about different diets and it's not always very easy to pick out the ones worth paying attention to. Here are one or two easy pointers on what to look out for. . .



► **Check the qualifications**

You can call yourself a Nutritional Therapist with an NVQ in catering – it's not necessarily a sign of expertise in food allergy. Look for people who have an association with the British Dietetic Association, British Nutrition Foundation or the Nutrition Society.

► **Self-diagnosis tests for allergies or food intolerance**

These are generally best avoided. Self-diagnosis tests are very popular but can be extremely misleading and potentially dangerous. There is no reliable test for intolerance and self-tests almost always recommend a list of foods to remove from your diet with no clinical explanation or rationale.

Be extremely cautious about diets that suggest eliminating foods without also giving advice on how you can replace the loss of nutrients with other foods rather than by taking a supplement.

► **Advice from the web**

The web offers a huge resource of dietary information but sadly only a small minority is supported with proven clinical research. All of the organisations mentioned below have extremely useful websites which are well worth visiting:

www.bda.uk.com

www.nutrition.org.uk

www.nutsoc.org.uk

www.fabflour.co.uk

www.coeliac.co.uk

Bad reasons to cut out wheat from your diet

▶ **To lose weight**

Many people mistakenly think bread is fattening when, in fact, foods like bread can be part of the weight-loss solution rather than the problem. If you want to cut down on calories, eat the bread without a fat spread. One medium slice of wholemeal bread contains only 0.9g fat.

▶ **Because a celebrity has done it**

Celebrity diets aren't always developed by a qualified nutritionist so should be treated with caution.

▶ **Because a website 'test' indicated you were intolerant**

The majority of these tests are not based on scientific evidence and can lead to incorrect results.

▶ **Self-diagnosis**

Self-diagnosis can be dangerous and may obscure the real reason for a health problem.

▶ **Because it's 'unhealthy'**

Wheat contains many healthy nutrients and helps to maintain a balanced diet.

▶ **To detox**

There is no scientific evidence to support detox diet claims. The body is designed to rid itself of unwanted toxins without a detoxification programme.

▶ **An unqualified practitioner recommended it**

Always seek advice from a qualified health professional such as a GP, nutritionist or dietitian.

Produced by the Flour Advisory Bureau

Tel: 020 7493 2521