

Practical Preventable Medicine



What's with wheat?

It's a huge question that is more controversial than one would imagine. Wheat is a nutritious grain that was our grain of choice for many thousands of years. Grown in fields that would be rotated with other crops and animal manure to fertilise the soil, it was then stone ground into a wholemeal flour that would be fermented via the sourdough technique to make leavened bread. Wheat was a major part of our transition from hunter gatherers to the civilisations we are today.

But, wheat is now a very different grain to that eaten by our great grandparents and previous generations. It has been hybridised and genetically modified to allow the crop to be sprayed liberally with glyphosate (the active ingredient in Round Up), and artificially fertilised so that it barely resembles the nutritious grain it once was. A recently released documentary, 'What's With Wheat?' investigates the many and complex changes in our most used grain and explores the issue of whether these changes have led to health problems broader than recognised gluten intolerance.

Coeliac disease, an extreme immunological reaction to gluten, was once a rare disease. Now it affects more than one in 100 Australians and it is estimated that a further one in five sufferers are undiagnosed – and these figures are rising. Coeliac disease is characterised by chronic or intermittent diarrhoea, irritable bowel symptoms, nausea, abdominal pain or bloating, Type 1 diabetes, and sometimes skin rashes and liver problems. If chronic (long term), people may also suffer from migraines, fertility issues, arthritis and other autoimmune disorders such as Autoimmune Thyroid Disease. People with this disease have immune cells measurable by testing and suffer from a large range of malabsorption issues resulting in deficiencies in vitamin D, iron, B12, folate, calcium and other minerals.

Aside from coeliac's, many people are presenting with similar symptoms without the auto-immune markers in what is called Non Coeliac Gluten Intolerance. The understanding of this is limited and disputed. However, worldwide research confirms that many people who experience the above-mentioned symptoms find that their symptoms are relieved by avoiding gluten. Questions remain as to what degree these problems relate to just gluten or to other aspects of wheat.

The documentary also looks at the effects of glyphosate on our body's intestinal flora needed to digest the fructose in wheat and fruits (which could account for the huge rise in numbers of people experiencing fructose intolerance), and how it can interrupt the pathway to producing neurotransmitters such as noradrenalin and dopamine – important for mood and stress. This can make you feel drowsy and unclear mentally.

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Before yeast was used as it is today, wheat, rye and other grain breads were fermented through the sourdough process, which creates enzymes that break down the proteins (such as gluten), allowing us to better digest these grains, reducing bloating and discomfort (for non-coeliac's). Variety is the key, and you can get a good loaf of organic sourdough bread with a variety of grains with bakers offering more choices.

Becoming aware is a huge step toward managing these issues and so we will be screening the documentary at Lawsons in the Kinglake Pub on Tuesday 23 May at 7pm and we will be having wheat free snacks, discussion and a Q&A session. I'll be putting posters up around town. Entry is \$10.

Hope to see you all there.

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