

» By Sarah Wooldrage

# Organic and gluten-free – a growing need

One in 100 Australians diagnosed with coeliac disease.

With an increasing amount of our food now over processed and grown using toxic synthetic chemicals, it is no wonder that food intolerances are on the rise.

Food intolerances are a delayed, negative reaction to food, and can be quite hard to recognise as symptoms build up slowly – different to that of a food allergy which is an adverse immune response to a food protein.

Whilst organic food is not a complete solution to food intolerances, it can be viewed as an option for assisting in the prevention of food intolerances.

A common food intolerance is that of gluten – diagnosed as coeliac disease.

Coeliac disease is an autoimmune disorder of the small intestine that occurs in people of all ages. It is caused by a reaction to gliadin, a gluten protein which is found in wheat.<sup>1</sup>

Symptoms of coeliac disease include abdominal distension, vomiting, diarrhoea, weight loss (or stunted growth in children)

and fatigue.

Testing for coeliac disease can be initially achieved through serological blood tests. Serology for anti-tTG antibodies has superseded older serological tests and has a high sensitivity (99%) and specificity (>90%) for identifying coeliac disease\*.<sup>1</sup>

So far, the only treatment for coeliac disease is to follow a lifelong gluten-free diet.

Deirdre Parkinson, a trained nurse of 30 years, and now a qualified naturopath and TAFE teacher, says that with the latest statistics proving that approximately 1 in 100 people in Australia are diagnosed with coeliac disease, it is now wonder she is receiving more patients complaining of gluten intolerance symptoms.

Deirdre believes that food intolerances have seen a rapid increase in the past 20 years.

"Whilst there is some research that points to the long history of hybridization of modern wheat as being partially responsible for gluten intolerance, I believe this has been intensified by the amount of synthetic chemicals and indigestible foods that we now eat.

"As food becomes over processed beyond recognition, the immune system can struggle to differentiate between what is a germ and what is not a germ. As a result, undigested food particles can leak into the blood stream, causing our immune system to sometimes mistake these food particles as invasive bacteria or other toxins. The end result can often lead to the development of allergic reactions, a weakened immune system, and/or auto-immune diseases."

Sue Dengate, director of Food Intolerance Network, says it can also be possible to have a gluten intolerance without having coeliac disease.

"In my experience with the Food Intolerance Network, there's a spectrum of gluten intolerance symptoms ranging from irritable bowel through to children's behaviour or even depression. People who react to gluten in this way are likely to be sensitive to other food chemicals including additives and possibly some natural food chemicals," say Sue.

Deirdre believes that our immune systems would be a lot healthier if we all followed an organic eating plan.

"When your food is produced with toxic chemicals, your immune system then needs to fight those toxins. If the immune system is too busy fighting these toxins it doesn't have



Deirdre Parkinson, Xtra Health and Wellness Clinic, Burleigh, Qld.



Sue Dengate, Food Intolerance Network ([www.fedupwithfoodadditives.info](http://www.fedupwithfoodadditives.info)).

time to fight off germs."

Akiko Nicholls, Managing Director Australian Certified Organic says that, "Organic eating seems to be highly favourable among people with food intolerances, as organics doesn't allow the use of common culprits including synthetic food additives, flavours and colourings. In addition, certified organic guarantees that what you are eating has not been subject to the use of growth hormones, antibiotics, synthetic farming chemicals and GMOs." ◀

## References

1. Prof. D A van Heel. Recent advances in coeliac disease. 2006. <http://gut.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/55/7/1037> (accessed November 24 2009).

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