

# Gluten-Free Diets: More than Just a Fad

Did you know the number of those who are gluten intolerant is estimated to increase worldwide by a factor of 10 in the next few years?<sup>1</sup> Gluten-free diets are generally prescribed for those suffering from gluten intolerance, but many retail experts now say **buying gluten-free products fits into shoppers' "desire to buy healthier products, to be more aware of food allergies and to rid their diets of unnecessary ingredients."**<sup>2</sup>

As the diagnosis of gluten intolerance grows, so does the demand for gluten-free products. The number of gluten-free products on store shelves has more than tripled at the end of October, 2006 to 2,042 items compared to 657 at the same period in 2001;<sup>3</sup> and gluten-free products reached \$660 million in U.S. sales, which is a 31.5 percent increase from the same period a year ago.<sup>4</sup> Some retailers offer gluten-free products scattered around their stores, while others are building entire displays of gluten-free products for those with the allergy.<sup>5</sup>

Approximately one in 133 people in the U.S., or one percent of the population, suffer from gluten intolerance.<sup>6</sup> Other estimates suggest that 2.91 million, or 97 percent, of those who are gluten intolerant remain undiagnosed because gluten intolerance was thought to be a rare occurrence in the U.S.<sup>7</sup>

As people become more aware of their nutritional needs and what certain foods do for their bodies, they are discovering they may have food allergies that have made them sick for years. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has identified eight of the most common allergens found in food: shellfish, peanuts, eggs, tree nuts, soy, dairy, fish, and wheat /gluten. Gluten, which is generally found in wheat, rye and barley, is also found in seemingly unrelated foods such as licorice and blue cheese.<sup>8</sup>

If not taken care of properly, gluten intolerance can lead to other disorders because of changes it causes in the small intestine that often result in the loss of ability to absorb crucial nutrients from food.

In a monumental move sure to make life safer for Celiac Disease sufferers and those on restricted diets, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released its proposed definition of gluten free foods in January. If approved, the new standards will regulate the claims companies can make on gluten free food packages. Bob's Red Mill, a pioneering manufacturer of gluten free products, participated with the FDA in its mission to define the standards by testifying on the matter in 2005.

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<sup>1</sup> "Gluten Free Market Set to Boom, Says Report" *Online Available:*  
[www.foodnavigator-usa.com/news-by-product/news.asp?id=68991&idCat=73&k=gluten-free-market](http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/news-by-product/news.asp?id=68991&idCat=73&k=gluten-free-market). 22 Nov. 2006.

<sup>2</sup> "Many Won't Be Gobbling Gluten at Thanksgiving." *The Oregonian*. 20 Nov. 2006.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> "Gluten Free Market Set to Boom, Says Report" *Online Available:*  
[www.foodnavigator-usa.com/news-by-product/news.asp?id=68991&idCat=73&k=gluten-free-market](http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/news-by-product/news.asp?id=68991&idCat=73&k=gluten-free-market). 22 Nov. 2006.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> "Forbidden List- Food and Ingredients Not Safe for a Gluten-Free Diet" *Online Available:*  
[http://www.celiac.com/st\\_prod.html?p\\_prodid=185&p\\_catid=12&sid=91hH9H1VWHM-DQD-06106269929.7e](http://www.celiac.com/st_prod.html?p_prodid=185&p_catid=12&sid=91hH9H1VWHM-DQD-06106269929.7e) 27 Nov. 2006