

FITNESS

Going gluten-free

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Going off gluten – that protein found in wheat, barley, oats, rye – is not a fad after all. The International Symposium on Wheat Related Disorders that was held over the weekend in Delhi, talked about the fact that while celiac disease is a problem that affects 1% of the population in North India (as per a study in AIIMS), non-celiac wheat sensitivity, as well as gluten allergy were also problems that were being seen.

Celiac disease is an autoimmune ailment (with a genetic basis), the symptoms of which can range from diarrhoea or constipation to headache, rashes, and even depression. It is caused by gluten that is not digested completely, and gradually damages the small intestine. This results in other food not getting digested, causing anaemia, bone weakness, and even poor growth.

The second possibility: a wheat allergy. The body reacts against agents in wheat, other than gluten. This can manifest as rashes, diarrhoea, even respiratory problems.

The third possibility: “A significant percentage of the general population report problems caused by wheat and/or gluten ingestion, even though they do not have celiac disease (CD) or wheat allergy (WA)...” says a literature review published in *Journal of the American College of Nutrition*. “Most patients report both gastrointestinal and non-gastrointestinal symptoms, and all report improvement of symptoms on a gluten-free diet. This clinical condition has been named non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS).”

In the case of NCGS, there may be minuscule damage to the gut over time. “It requires an advanced blood test, an IgG-antibody-based test that detects delayed food allergy,” says Dr Sarath Gopalan, a Delhi-based paediatric gastroenterologist. While celiac disease and wheat allergy can be tested in India, NCGS cannot. “The only way is for those who experience symptoms to eliminate gluten for a while to examine the cause,” he says.

In this column, we decode health trends and decide if it's all just 'hype' or actually 'happening'

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