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Cichon: Living Gluten-Free

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Researchers from the University of Maryland School of Medicine Center for Celiac Research have found. "You're never too old to develop celiac disease," according to Alessio Fasano, M.D., director of the University of Maryland's Mucosal Biology Research Center and the celiac research center, which led a study that included results from Buffalo's Women & Children's Hospital

Related Coverage: [Celiac On Rise - Among Adults](#) | [Gluten Free Goes Trendy](#) | [CBS News on Celiac Disease](#)



Steve Cichon is a reporter for WBEN Radio, and was diagnosed about 4 years ago with Celiac Disease. He's served on the Board of Directors of the Western New York Gluten Free Diet Support Group, and tries to stay up on the latest trends on and the gluten-free diet and gluten-free living for his own benefit, as well as his many gluten-free friends.

According to one online definition, Celiac Disease is an inherited, autoimmune disease in which the lining of the small intestine is damaged from eating gluten and other proteins found in wheat, barley, rye, and possibly oats.

The good news is, Celiac Disease is very easily controlled by removing wheat, barley and rye from your diet. That bad news is those three ingredients, in one form or another, are found in a very high percentage of processed foods.

More good news: Aside from wheat, barley, and rye, a gluten-intolerant person can eat just about anything taken directly from the ground or animal kingdom. Fruits, vegetables, dairy, meats, eggs are all gluten-free in their natural form. It makes cooking and eating at home very easy, and very healthy.

But ordering a chicken breast in a restaurant, or even eating one at a well-meaning relative's cookout can be filled with anxiety, because you need to know if it was marinated, and whether the marinade contains malt flavor (made from barley) or wheat starch or any other number of ways gluten can be hidden on ingredient labels. Sometimes it is clearly labeled, but gluten is not one of allergens the government requires manufacturers to list on labels.

As Celiac Disease becomes more pervasive, I've tried to offer help, assistance, and just a friendly ear to acquaintances, friends, and friends of friends who are new to dealing with Celiac Disease.

For more information on living gluten free in Western New York, check out the local support group's website:

buffaloglutenfree.org

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It's simple to manage, you just stop eating food that can kill you. (Yes, untreated Celiac Disease can cause several different cancers along the lower GI tract.) The problem is, in the process, you really tear down your entire life and rebuild it. Food is life, and as a busy on-the-go type of guy, it took me quite a while to figure out how to fit this diet (which has no room for cheating) into my life. Fast food is just out of the question, with only one or two exceptions. No packing a sandwich for lunch.

For me, there was a lot of anger and depression early on. But luckily now, even in the last 5 years, there are so many more resources (and good gluten free versions of favorite foods!) it's becoming easier and easier to deal with every day. And I am much better adjusted to the gluten-free lifestyle (it really is more than a diet), and while I miss fast food hamburgers and being able to grab any pizza from anywhere as a quick meal, I'm also excited at the new opportunities for gluten-free concoctions.

Like I said, I try to offer assistance to friends and friends-of-friends when it comes to living gluten free. Here are a condensed series of e-mails I sent to a friend who just found out she had Celiac Disease, trying to offer some realism, some hope, and some of the local stores, restaurants, and products I've used to make dealing with Celiac easier.

Its pretty simple, but its not easy. Wheat, Barley (shown a lot of times as Malt) and rye are in all sorts places you wouldn't expect.

Lotsa label reading, but also learning to rely on whole foods... The good stuff like plain ol'hunks of meat and vegetables. its actually a much healthier way to eat... less processed stuff. The outside aisles of the grocery store. The experts always say that's the best place to shop health-wise... and just about all of it is gluten free!

I've found the easiest thing is to just change the way i eat certain things. Like sandwiches. Really no such thing anymore. There's GF bread, but its not like regular bread. I will occasionally make lettuce wraps... kinda like a turkey sandwich. You learn to adapt.

While Tops, Wegmans, and FeelRite all have great Gluten free areas, I suggest staying away from the Gluten free stuff for a while, and just trying to adapt your life. at some point you'll want a cookie... and then maybe try one of the GF models. They don't taste much like regular cookies... with a few exceptions. Pamela's double chocolate GF cookies are DELICIOUS. but there are only 9 for \$3.49, and they don;t always have the double chocolate variety everywhere. Udi's GF bread is actually awesome. Sometimes (usually) the bread is very gritty-- its gluten that gives wonder bread its delicious chewy texture. This udi's stuff replicates it somehow. It might be black magic, but i don't care. Its delicious.

I would also try different tops and different Wegmans locations... the selection of GF stuff varies at each store.

Eating out is very tough, especially in the beginning, when you're still trying to figure out what you can and cant eat. Eating at someone else's house is pretty tough, too. I get used to eating before i go out to dinner at someones house. Several family members have become very aware of my diet, and take special care of me. I don't like having people go out of their way for me, but a few aunts do, and it really almost makes me cry every time.

Pizza Plant (the one on transit only) has good chicken fingers and pizza on Wednesdays.. Bocce Club on Bailey in Amherst has AMAZING, DELICIOUS gf pizza that tastes like normal pizza... and you can get that anytime....

Chinese Food: PF Changs is really good... but it isn't real corner joint chinese. Golden Duck... Maple and Ayers in Amherst makes anything on the menu GF. (the issue with Chinese food is the soy sauce... Wheat is usually the number 2 ingredient... Though LaChoy is GF) There's also a place near the Southgate plaza... My sister got a menu in the mail, and they said they do alot of different asian food GF. It's on Seneca, just across Union from Southgate Plaza... next to carolina Furniture.

Outback Steak House has a good GF menu... That's a great relief when traveling. We've been to Outbacks and PF Changs all over Florida, Ohio, and Puerto Rico. Speaking of travel, we've been on 8 Carnival cruises... in large measure because they cater to the GF diet so well, and leaves us not to worry.

Mighty Taco has a GF menu... No supermightys because of the flour tortilla, but you can get just about anything on a corn tortilla. This is a lifesaver for me. Mighty Taco and Wendys chili are the only fast foods I can safely eat.

Curly's is a really nice restaurant... a nice date place. you can get a delicious dinner and a glass of wine for 2 for a reasonable price. Tandoori's will make you GF stuff, too...

Beer? For a few years, I didn't have any beer, because GF beer was only micro-brewed in a few places. Now, Redbridge is made by Anheuser-Busch... Make with Sorghum (whatever the hell that is) instead of barley. its a bit bitter... More like Guinness in flavor than say a Bud.. but its the only beer i can drink! Its at most

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Wegmans... some Tops. They also carry gf Bard's Ale at the Premier Store on Delaware Ave in Tonawanda.

Monica (my wife) and I have a bunch of little appetizer/dessert thingees we make for family stuff... and I'll bet you have a great family like mine... They've really gotten into making sure I can eat at least something. People think I'm a health freak the way i hit the veggie tray.. Its a better way to eat anyway. I'm always looking for easy, good GF dishes that I can bring to a party, so I can eat something, and share a good GF dish... let people know the diet isn't all that bad!!

I just noticed this weekend that Wegmans Brand rice chex are gluten free now... \$2 GF cereal. Yey! It's really getting easier and easier to find GF stuff. When i first started, there were NO cereals or beer. All the Chex cereals are now gluten free (except wheat chex, but no kidding.)

Christmas Cookies. We make GF oatmeal, chocolate chip, and a few others. We sub regular flour with Rice flour in those recipes, and work pretty well. The taste is slightly different, as is the texture... but if you make oatmeal raisin walnut... or walnut chocolate chip. you don;t taste the difference. We make probably 30 dozen cookies to share with friends and family... and nobody knows the difference. there is a betty crocker mix for GF cake, chocolate chip cookies, and brownies. The cookies and yellow cake are OK, the devils food cake is good, the brownies are delicious. The only warning: the batter on all gluten free baking tastes terrible, so no beater licking. You have to wait til it comes out of the oven.

Pasta: the GF pasta really isn;t that bad if you buy the right brand, and cook it properly. You have to boil it much longer, and rinse it VERY thoooroughly... otherwise it tastes a little pasty. Tinkyada is pretty good, but the best, far and away, is Schar pasta. good stuff.

I could continue to ramble... but won't. Once you know the rules, you follow them. And then you don;t get cancer,... which is what you get if you dont follow the rules.

I got very depressed quite often early on about what i couldn't eat. Now, it very rarely, if ever happens.

I have a lot of gluten-free friends on facebook. it helps. They have the support group meetings. they help you to know you aren't alone.

Much more on Gluten Free living in Western New York at buffaloglutenfree.org

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