

# GOODBYE TO ALL THAT

With more and more Americans going gluten-free, Ginny Graves wonders, is the diet all it's cracked up to be?

**F**ood allergies typically fall into one of two categories—terrifying (killer peanuts) or tedious (everything else). Now there's one exception: gluten—the allergen that has single-handedly spawned some of the hottest new bakeries, blogs, restaurants, and cookbooks and confers a certain insider cachet on sufferers. The g-free market is now worth several billion, up nearly 17 percent from 2007. Even Chelsea Clinton's nine-tier wedding cake was made without gluten, which is a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye. Why the sudden fascination?

Blame Gwyneth. Ever since the ultra-svelte star blogged about her gluten-free detox in 2009, former carb shunners have turned their practiced eye toward rooting out gluten in hopes of transforming their figures. The diet does help some people shed pounds, but only because the approach is so restrictive that there's very little you can actually eat. No bread, no pasta, no cereal, no beer. (Adherents learn to embrace amaranth and quinoa.) But if weight loss is the goal, the diet may backfire. Packaged gluten-free foods are often higher in carbs, fat, sugar, and calories than their regular counterparts. "I just read a recipe for gluten-free carrot cake that had 43 grams of fat in one serving," says Christine Avanti, an L.A. nutritionist. Avoiding gluten can also set you up for a B-vitamin deficiency, since wheat is rich in thiamine and other Bs.

**AGAINST THE GRAIN**  
INCREASING NUMBERS OF ADULTS ARE BEING DIAGNOSED WITH CELIAC DISEASE AND GLUTEN INTOLERANCE. PHOTOGRAPHED BY IRVING PENN.

If the trend were just about vanity, it would quickly go the way of the grapefruit diet. But a growing number of people are actually intolerant to gluten. For years researchers thought that celiac disease, an autoimmune disorder that makes it difficult to digest gluten, began only in childhood, but now people are being diagnosed in their 30s, 40s, and 50s, according to a recent study in the *Annals of Medicine*. In celiac sufferers, gluten damages the lining of the small intestine, causing diarrhea, gas, bloating, and headaches. The symptoms are so prosaic they're easy to chalk up to spicy meals, bad seafood, too many martinis, or stress—which is why most of the people (estimated at one in 133) who now have celiac don't know it. The disease can increase the risk of osteoporosis and intestinal malignancies, so doctors suggest that anyone with severe gastrointestinal problems, unexplained infertility (another outcome of the illness), or a family history get tested.

Even if you don't have full-blown

celiac, you may have ill effects from eating gluten. More experts now accept the formerly fringe concept of "gluten sensitivity"—that eating pasta can make you feel foggy and have mood swings. "We've just realized that it's different from a wheat allergy or celiac," says Alessio Fasano, M.D., director of the Center for Celiac Research at the University of Maryland School of Medicine. As there's no test for gluten sensitivity, which is far more common than celiac, the only way to tell if you have it is to try a gluten-free diet.

Exactly why gluten is suddenly wreaking havoc on our intestines is still unclear. Some experts blame it on our increasingly gluten-heavy diets (manufacturers are using more of it than ever as a binding agent in bread and packaged foods). Others are suspicious of wheat itself, which has been scientifically tweaked to make it more pest-resistant. Still others think our overuse of antibiotics has thrown off the delicate balance of intestinal bacteria, impairing our ability to digest the stuff. While scientists sort out the mystery, marketers are jumping on the moment, creating gluten-free everything. Even lipstick. □

