

[IMAGE]

The Impact of Grains and Carbs on Your Diet

By Gary Merel, MS, LAc

Despite the many different and popular diets and eating lifestyles, there is no "right" or "wrong" diet. The "right" diet is the one that works for you. Since each digestive system, much like a finger print, is unique, the foods that work for you might not work for someone else. However, there are definitely foods and food groups we should only eat sparingly, or not at all. High on that list are refined carbohydrates and grains.

Over a year ago, Pam went in for a routine medical exam. She was 54 years old at the time, and had been a strict organic vegetarian for much of her life. Pam wasn't ill or exhibiting any symptoms, but her comprehensive, metabolic blood panel reported high cholesterol and the beginning of insulin resistance. Pam was shocked — she ate what she thought was a healthy diet, exercised, and had no incidence of high cholesterol in her family. She was surprised to learn from her medical practitioner that her grain and carbohydrate-rich diet was likely the culprit.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), more than one-third of U.S. adults and 17 percent of U.S. children are obese. Though obesity markedly increases the risk of lifestyle illnesses, such as Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease (CVD), and mental health conditions, there is a growing incidence of illness in healthy-looking people. Many doctors and researchers now believe that illnesses ranging from heart disease to Alzheimer's are not due to overconsumption of fat, but rather grains and carbohydrates.

According to Dr. David Perlmutter, a leader in the emerging field of functional neurology, grain-heavy diets are a major contributing factor in the onset of many cognitive disorders. Dr. Perlmutter accuses refined grains and carbs for being addictive, prevalent, harmful, and backed by powerful industries. In his latest book, *Grain Brain*, he even goes so far as to call gluten, the protein found in wheat, barley, rye, and oats, "the tobacco of the 21st century." While I don't necessarily believe that all grains are bad and that no one should eat them, I think he does make some interesting points.

What's The Story Behind Grains?

Humans started cultivating grains 10–20,000 years ago, with the advent of agriculture. However, our bodies haven't changed a whole lot since before the last Ice Age. And while humans certainly continue to evolve,

sometimes our genetic evolution cannot keep pace. Drastic dietary changes in recent years have only exacerbated this issue.

For example, the grains we consumed then were much different than the grains we consume now. Today's wheat, for example, contains up to 40 times more gluten than grain produced a mere 50 years ago. This is because of a process called hybridization, the process of breeding desirable characteristics such as shorter, browner, higher-yielding wheat varieties. According to Dr. William Davis, author of the best-selling book *Wheat Belly*, these modern wheat varieties also contain much more gluten than previous generations. Already a difficult protein to digest, the rise of glutinous proteins in our dwindling varieties of wheat puts additional strain on our intestines.

It's way too much for our digestive tracts to handle. Because of this, 1 in 3 Americans are now gluten intolerant, and 8 in 10 have a genetic predisposition for developing the intolerance at some point in their lives, according to Dr. Kenneth Fine, a pioneer in gluten intolerance research. Again, grains are not fundamentally bad, but our immune system just cannot cope with the quantities of grains and carbs we now eat.

But Aren't Grains Supposed To Be Healthy?

There is a big difference between whole grains and refined grains. Whole grains, such as wheat, barley, brown rice and buckwheat, are much healthier than wonder bread and white flour. This is because whole grains contain more fiber that slows the release of sugars. Still, even with healthy grains, there can be too much. Our bodies just haven't developed the capabilities yet to digest the vast amounts of grains that we increasingly consume.

How Are Grains Addictive?

Researchers discovered in the 1970s that gluten was addictive. When digested, gluten produces compounds that create a pleasurable buzz. These compounds were named "exorphins" by the National Institute of Health researcher who discovered them, Christine Zioudrou. This rush is why people love carbs.

How Prevalent Are Grains, Exactly?

The average American consumes 133 pounds of wheat-derived food each year. This is a lot, considering humans have only eaten grains for the past 10–20,000 years.

But What's So Bad About Grains?

Grains can lead to digestive disorders, cognitive malfunction, and heart issues, among others. They are the main cause for high cholesterol and lifestyle illnesses such as Type 2 diabetes and obesity.

Besides being difficult to digest and potentially leading to digestive disorders from IBS to Celiac disease, grains also disturb cognitive function. Dr. Perlmutter believes this is so because a) grains elevate blood sugar, leading to insulin resistance; b) consuming grains fills the body with gluten and other potential allergens, putting the body on over-drive or alert; and c) they fuel neurodegeneration, leading to such disorders as Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and Huntington's. Dr. Perlmutter calls grains "a terrorist group that bullies our most precious organ, the brain."

Recent studies also strongly suggest that there may be a causal relationship between grain and gluten consumption and cardiovascular disease (CVD).

Decreased consumption of carbohydrates helps reduce body mass index (BMI), weight, and insulin levels, among other CVD indicators.

How Do Big Corporations Back Grains And What Is The Concern With That?

There are five big companies that control the world's grain trade — ADM, Bunge, Cargill, Glencore International, and Louis Dreyfus — commonly referred to as the "ABCDs." These companies routinely spend millions of dollars per year lobbying Washington for support. The "ABCDs" can influence government to allow for greater subsidies for grain producers, and can also convince medical practitioners of the health benefits of the grains produced. As mentioned earlier, the "right" diet for you might be the "wrong" diet for someone else. However, the strength of the grain trade lobby in Washington encourages even organizations like the American Heart Association (AHA) and American Diabetes Association (ADA) to support grain consumption universally. While not all grains are bad, we need to question why grains represent the largest piece of the food pyramid, and if it's outdated or unsafe for them to be there.

Navigating food choices doesn't have to be stressful. By avoiding or removing potential certain problematic foods, you can prevent the onset of illness or overcome chronic disease. After a few months without any grains, Pam significantly lowered her CVD indicators. Though it's okay to enjoy a nice baguette every once in a while, it's important to make the baguette the exception, and not the rule.

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