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Limited Dinner Menu

Posted by **Kait McKinney**



Photo by David Derong

It seems common among students to complain about the lack of appetizing food Iowa State has to offer. We whine about the bland food at dining centers, and we are reluctant in spending more than a few dollars on a good meal when we dine out. For Elise Grantham, sometimes making the selection isn't so easy. The same old-same old just won't do.

In February 2010, Elise made a trip to her doctor to check out her thyroid problems related to an autoimmune disease, when the body attacks its own cells. In order to get a better understanding of why Elise was having issues with her thyroid, her doctor decided an allergy test would help. The result of the test concluded her allergies consisted of such foods as eggs, bananas, oranges and cheese. In addition to these foods, the doctors found one more allergy that would result in the biggest endeavor in Elise's diet.

"My doctor tested all possible food groups for allergies, and gluten turned up to be one of them," she explains. Since that doctor's visit, Elise has been adapting to gluten intolerance.

"The most common symptoms of gluten intolerance without celiac disease are mainly limited to the gastrointestinal tract and include abdominal pains, cramps, diarrhea, and loss of appetite," says Laura Kimm, a West Ames Hy-Vee dietitian. "Celiac disease is a more serious form of gluten intolerance and is a genetic, inheritable autoimmune disease that interferes with the digestion of important vitamins and minerals," she says. Because the issue lies in the small intestine, vital nutrients will not be taken in by the body and can result in serious problems. "People who have this condition have an inability to absorb the nutrients from food so malnutrition can develop," she explains.

Even though Elise and others with the disorder cannot actually feel what is not being absorbed into the small intestine, she could feel her stomach reacting. For those who are unaware they are gluten intolerant, every meal can be a nightmare. Abdominal pains, cramping and an uneasy stomach follow what seems like every meal or snack. Uncomfortable trips to the bathroom become frequent, and nothing can soothe your stomach. It can be terribly uncomfortable.

For Elise, her stomach pains became unbearable. "It [gets] to the point where I do not want to go anywhere. I just want to stay in bed," she says. Oftentimes, these symptoms are what initially drive people to see their doctor. However, gluten intolerance can have more serious or even permanent distress if a strict, gluten-free diet is ignored. If Elise continued to include gluten in her diet, she could become infertile or acquire a vitamin deficiency leading to insufficient nourishment in her nervous system. Individuals who experience vitamin and nourishment deficiency often run into problems like malnutrition, as Kimm explained, and they can even develop autism.

Kristi Patel, assistant director for retail locations on campus, explains campus cafés and restaurants do not cater to gluten intolerant individuals. "We don't have a specific menu for individuals with gluten-free needs. There are certainly products in our facilities that are gluten free, but we don't have very many items that would normally contain gluten that are formulated to be gluten free," she says. Because Iowa State does not offer specific gluten-free menus, a simple stop at the Hub for

lunch between classes probably isn't the best idea for people like Elise.

People with gluten intolerance find that structuring an appropriate meal can be a struggle, and for students on campus, finding a dining center or café that caters to their allergy can be frustrating. While Iowa State does not offer specific gluten-free menus at cafes and restaurants like the Memorial Union Food Court, C-Stores or Clyde's, there is relief.

"[Iowa State] houses a dietitian to take care of our residential students' dietary needs," says Jill Magnuson-Arroyo, associate director for residential dining. "She meets one-on-one with the students and reviews menu choices and menu alterations, so students end up with food that tastes good."

However, Elise differs from most gluten intolerant individuals in that she also lives a vegan lifestyle, meaning she doesn't consume or use animal products. She has been eating a vegetarian diet since she was four. Now, at age 20, Elise has been on a vegan diet for almost a year. Living a vegan lifestyle may appear to only make her food choices more difficult, but Elise finds it helpful. "I'm already used to having to be aware and look at ingredients. [You are] just conscious on what [is in food]." Looking at ingredients has become second nature to Elise.

It is fortunate for ISU students that the university provides options and resources, but what about off-campus? Out of the many restaurants located in Ames, Elise finds her favorite gluten-free dishes at The Spice, a Thai restaurant located on Main Street. After numerous requests that meals be prepared gluten-free, Tanita Eamkajomsiri, manager of The Spice, decided a gluten-free menu should be offered. "We're always trying very hard to accommodate our existing customers with their requests," Eamkajomsiri explains. "We want to make it easy for our customers to enjoy their food at The Spice while [satisfying] their needs in terms of their allergies."

Fortunately for Elise, on the scale of intolerance, she is low to moderate. She is not to the point that her foods need to be cooked in separate pans. But Elise still finds it upsetting to avoid the foods she once enjoyed. "I love bread and beer," she laughs, "so that's sad." Elise can still dine out with her friends, but it's usually a different routine. "I tend to not go out to eat, [but] when friends want to, I'll eat ahead of time and get soup or something at the restaurant."

Gluten intolerance is genetic. "My mom has it [too]," Elise discloses. "When I got tested, so did she." When Elise heads home for a break from Ames, she finds it easier to find food around the house, dealing with both vegan and gluten-free diet limitations. She chose to be a vegan is for ethical reasons, not diet and health reasons. "I think being vegan is a lot easier than having a gluten intolerance," she explains.

Fortunately, Elise does have options with her gluten intolerance, and as a vegan, there's a wide variety of animal-free dishes to choose from. But even with this silver lining, it is still tiresome for Elise to have to limit her food choices. "As Americans, we congregate and socialize over food, so it has been a struggle to have to worry about my food restriction when I just want to hang out with my friends," she says.



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I think canteens should at least have a small menu for people who has gluten intolerance. In the near future, more and more restaurants and other food establishments should have gluten-free menu for gluten intolerant people.

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