



At a gluten-free picnic in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, young guests enjoy iced carrot cake, cookies, and other goodies without gluten.



life after bread

Gluten-free eating // BY RHEA MAZE

As a malnourished young child, Allison Ryan's physical condition baffled her family. "I had a distended belly, sunken eyes, and was always fatigued. The doctors could not figure out what was wrong with me," Ryan says. After several false diagnoses, an endoscopy revealed she had celiac sprue, an autoimmune disorder that causes the production of antibodies in response to gluten and damages the small intestine's ability to absorb nutrients from food. The only treatment is a gluten-free diet.

Gluten refers to a mixture of proteins found in wheat, barley, rye, triticale, spelt, kamut, and oats. Gluten is the second most common ingredient in today's mainstream diet (after sugar). Used as a thickener, additive, and flavoring, gluten is found in everything from processed foods to alcohol to cosmetics. It's even in postage stamps.

Now 28 and living in Campbell, Ryan has grown accustomed to a life of avoiding gluten. "The food stuff is easy. There is a gluten-free alternative to everything... What I find challenging is not being able to drink a beer when I'm out with friends."

Dr. Gary Gray of Stanford University Medical Center says that celiac sprue remains one of the most commonly misdiagnosed conditions. "It is

often missed as the main diagnosis and symptoms are simply attributed to irritable bowel syndrome," Gray says. He hopes that medical science will soon provide celiac sufferers with a way to interrupt the negative immune response to gluten.

Celiac sprue is not the only reason why people choose to go gluten-free. Gluten sensitivity is a common diagnosis for a number of health problems, says Nancy Birang, a Board-Certified Nutrition Consultant who practices in Los Gatos and teaches at Bauman College.

"More people are reacting negatively to gluten than ever before," Birang says. She sees a clear correlation between increased instances of gluten sensitivity and our society's consumption of processed foods. "We are exposed to gluten so much more today than in the past," she says.

To test for an aversion to gluten, Birang recommends that patients eliminate all gluten from their diet for four to six weeks. Then, with an empty stomach, they should eat some food containing gluten and watch for a negative reaction, which would indicate gluten sensitivity.

To learn more about gluten-free eating, look for the expanded version of this article at www.eucalyptusmagazine.com/gluten-free. ■



• On Thursday, October 6, attend *Eucalyptus Magazine's* Dinner Event with Dr. Gary Gray of Stanford University hosting a discussion on gluten-free diets. Guests will enjoy a gluten-free and dairy-free dinner prepared by Chef Lauren Hoover, who specializes in cooking for health issues including diabetes, autism, celiac sprue, autoimmune diseases, and inflammatory conditions. Hoover is the author of the *No Wheat No Dairy No Problem* cookbook.