

**Printed in VegNews 2005**  
**Gluten Sensitivity**  
**By Ilyse A. Simon RD**

Dear Ms. Simon,

I've been hearing a lot lately about gluten sensitivity. I eat a lot of seitan at my local Chinese restaurant, and now I'm worried that I might be getting too much of a good thing. Should I be concerned?

Sincerely,  
Chow Fun Charlie

Dear Chow,

I hear a lot about gluten sensitivity too. It's a serious condition where the gluten, or protein part of the grain, initiates an allergic type reaction in the body. When I think about gluten, I think of baking bread. Kneading and kneading, with sticky fingers and soft squishy dough. That's gluten, the sticky, squishy elasticity that is notable in wheat bread. Gluten is what makes seitan chewy. It is also what is absent when baking with rice flours - breads are more apt to crumble without that sticky gluten.

Gluten is found in wheat, spelt, kamut, rye, and barley. Grains such as rice, quinoa, corn, and millet are gluten free. Seitan is wheat gluten, and can be a good protein source for vegetarians. If you are suspecting a food allergy, wheat is one of the top ten most allergic foods, but then again so is soy (an amazing staple of a vegan diet), so unless you have reason to suspect a sensitivity, there may be no reason to eliminate it.

People can have different levels of sensitivity to gluten. Like a food allergy, some people can have gluten a few times a week and feel fine, others might be able to tolerate it only once a week, and others still may be strictly allergic and not able to tolerate it at all. There are also folks with Celiac disease, an autoimmune condition in which a strict gluten free diet is necessary. Having a sensitivity to wheat, is different from a gluten sensitivity, where you may be able to tolerate spelt and other gluten containing non-wheat grains. But if you have Celiac, neither wheat nor any other gluten containing grains should be part of your diet.

If you don't have any nagging health problems, and Celiac doesn't run in your family, foods like seitan and whole grain breads may be an enjoyable part of your varied diet. If there's a concern for you, I'd suggest a consultation with a Registered Dietitian or qualified Nutritionist. Someone skilled in food allergies would be able to guide you, and help test your gluten sensitivity with an allergy elimination diet.

In the meantime, if you are looking for gluten free fare, Asian restaurants are a great place to start. Chow Fun noodles, for instance, are made from rice. Rice noodles are a

staple of Chinese, Thai, and Vietnamese cuisine. So dig into some veggie Pad Thai or Vegetable Pho with vermicelli noodles.

### **Side Bar: The Top Ten**

Food Allergies are on the rise. The National Institutes of Health states that at least 30 million Americans suffer from a food sensitivity. Classrooms are becoming 'peanut-free', restaurants are highlighting wheat free entrees, and you can buy a cookie free from almost everything! Here are the top ten most highly allergenic foods. The top 6, account for 90% of all food allergies. If you suspect you have a food allergy, consult a nutritionist to help you weed through the maize.

#### **The Top Ten:**

Peanuts & Tree Nuts

Fish & Shellfish

Wheat

Gluten Grains

Dairy

Soy

Egg

Corn

Citrus

Chocolate