



How much is too much? Tolerable amount of gluten for people with Coeliac Disease.

It is notorious that all physicians familiar with celiac disease continue to enforce their policy of “zero tolerance”: no gluten whatsoever should ever be ingested by a celiac person! However, the scientific community has been faced time and time again with the question of identifying what indeed is the real minimum of gluten that a celiac individual can safely ingest. This study just accepted for publication online on February 28, 2008 is a careful analysis of all published studies addressing this issue. The authors included in their analysis a total of 13 studies (3 randomized controlled, 1 cohort, 2 crossover, and 7 cross-sectional). Their conclusions? The daily amount of tolerable gluten varied widely between studies. Whilst some patients tolerated an average of 34 to 36 mg of gluten per day, other patients who consumed as low as 10 mg of gluten per day developed mucosal abnormalities. The effect of the consumption of “gluten-free” products with different degrees of gluten contamination was also inconsistent.

Although there is no evidence to suggest a single definitive threshold, a daily gluten intake of <10mg is unlikely to cause any significant histological abnormalities. This supports very well prior conclusions of a panel of experts in Europe who concluded that any amount up to 10 mg was safe for all; any amount above 100 mg was unsafe for all; and in between 10-100 mg per day lied the inter-individual difference in sensitivity.

Bottom line: If one considers that 10 mg of gluten is present in something like a pin-head, well... then the take home message remains: zero tolerance!

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