

# The Nutrition Reporter™

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EXTRA

The independent newsletter that reports vitamin, mineral, and food therapies

## Eating "Against the Grain" for Better Health

Guest Commentary by Melissa Diane Smith, Dipl.Nutr.

Could one of the pillars of the modern diet actually be a major contributor to modern disease?

That's the idea behind my new book, *Going Against the Grain*: that eating a lot of grains – the so-called "staff of life" and the stuff used to make bread, pasta, and pizza – increases the risk of developing heart disease, cancer, arthritis, and countless other diseases.

The idea literally goes against the grain of the society we live in and the dietary advice typically dispensed by most experts. It directly counters the idea that grains – even whole grains and their resident fiber – reduce the risk of disease.

It goes against the huge and powerful industries that grow and process grains and turn them into edible food products that can sit on store shelves for years. It even goes against much of the dairy and meat industries because most livestock are now fattened up on grains.

The idea also takes aim at many of the comfort foods we have grown up with. It's hard for many people to imagine *never* eating typical bread, pasta, and pizza again.

But if you are willing to eat against the grain – and eat more vegetables – the payoff will be a healthier diet that leaves you feeling better, having more energy, and lowering your long-term risk of serious disease.

### DIFFERENT FROM HIGH-PROTEIN DIETS

By avoiding grains, it's important to point out, you won't be left eating a high-protein or high-fat diet. The nutrients, fiber, and carbohy-

drates found in grains are actually poor nutritional substitutes for those found in vegetables, fruits, and nuts. The protein in grains is also a nutritionally inadequate substitute for what's found in such heart-healthy proteins as chicken, turkey, fish, and omega-3-enriched eggs (which, it should be noted, are eggs more like those from free-range, grass-fed chickens, the way eggs were meant to be).

*Going Against the Grain* picks up where *Syndrome X*, the book I coauthored with Jack Challem and Dr. Burton Berkson, left off. It expands on the reasons why refined grains, such as white-flour products and sweeteners such as high-fructose corn syrup, are hazardous to our health. However, it also explains that the solution, contrary to popular opinion, is not to replace refined grains with whole grains.

### LOW NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF GRAINS

On the most basic level, grains – whether in refined form or whole-grain form – are high in carbohydrates and calories and relatively low in nutrients, especially when compared to vegetables and fruits. (Yes, it's true that whole grains have more nutrients than refined grains, but they also contain more *antinutrients*, substances that impair the absorption or utilization of nutrients such as calcium, iron, zinc and some key B vitamins.) Two-thirds of all Americans are overweight, so most Americans could benefit from getting more nutritional bang for their buck with the calories they do eat. This is rule number one why everyone can benefit

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from cutting down their intake of grains and eating more vegetables.

But there are more reasons. Grains, particularly wheat products, have an addictive nature and most people have trouble *not* overeating them. They provoke blood sugar highs often followed by blood sugar lows which leave us yearning for a quick fix of energy a few hours later. In addition, grains can elicit feel-good drug-like endorphins that cause a physical and emotional high. Both of these factors ultimately lead to eating more and more grains (which in turn leads to unwanted weight gain).

#### GLUTEN SENSITIVITY COMMON

Also, it's a surprise to many people, but one in 111 American adults has celiac disease, a severe reaction to gluten – a collection of proteins in wheat and other common grains. In celiac disease, the body reacts so strongly to gluten that it damages the gut wall, resulting in nutrient deficiencies and other health complications.

Furthermore, research now shows that as many as one in two people may have gluten sensitivity that isn't celiac disease but still causes troublesome symptoms. Health problems associated with gluten sensitivity include anything from minor small intestine irritation and symptoms such as fatigue, joint aches, bloating and digestive upset, to long-term complications such as osteoporosis, infertility, autoimmune diseases, and small intestine cancer. Gluten, therefore, acts as a sheer poison for some people or as a mild or strong irritant that slowly sets the stage for disease in others. These are more good reasons to eat against the grain.

#### AN OPTIMAL DIET

If it seems “counterintuitive” to eat against the grain for health – as one magazine editor once told me – consider that we've all been conditioned through advertising, marketing, and even the food pyramid to believe that grains are necessary for a healthy diet.

But when you consider the history of the human diet, nothing could be further from the truth. Our earliest ancestors – and hunter-gatherer societies around the world – thrived without any grains in their diets, and our nutrient requirements today were shaped genetically by the nutrients our ancestors obtained in their diets – those found in meat, fish, vegetables, fruits and nuts. Eating against the grain is our natural way of eating, so all of us can benefit from reducing grains to at least some extent.

For some people, that simply means replacing wheat in the diet with more vegetables. Others need to avoid the entire family of gluten grains (i.e., wheat, rye, barley, oats, triticale, spelt and kamut), while others need to eat totally against the grain.

Fortunately, the most flavorful food items are vegetables, herbs, fruits, nuts, fish, and meats. By creatively combining these foods, you'll eat delicious meals *and* have food be your best medicine. □ Article © 2002 Melissa Diane Smith

*Going Against the Grain* is a groundbreaking and thought-provoking book. Grains account for most of the high-glycemic foods on the market – that is, foods that increase the risk of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Increasingly, the most sensible diet would avoid large amounts of grains. We heartily recommend this book to our readers.

– *The Nutrition Reporter*

For more information about *Going Against the Grain* (Contemporary Books, \$14.95), visit the web site [www.melissadianesmith.com](http://www.melissadianesmith.com). The book is available through all book stores and [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).

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