

IN THIS ISSUE

1-2...Psychological Aspects of Food Allergies & Celiac Disease

3...Information on support groups

4...Gluten & Allergen Free Expo in Dallas, Books by Dr. Wangen

5...Advanced Course in Seattle, FDA Gluten Free Labeling



The Psychological Aspects of Food Allergies & Celiac Disease

Guest article courtesy of Jennifer Leeson, LCSW.

Living with life threatening food allergies, celiac disease, or other significant food restrictions can be challenging in ways that go beyond knowing what to eat and what to avoid. The negative impact of having food allergies can greatly affect one's emotional and social well being and their quality of life.

Research into the specific impacts of living with food allergies or celiac disease is being done, though still on a relatively small scale. Studies related to these issues have identified a number of areas of specific concern: aspects of general health; activities within the family; eating outside the home; eating within school environments; reactions of other people; food labeling; previous allergic reactions to food; co-existing allergies; impact of the food allergy on quality of life of caregivers; and burden of responsibility. (A small, yet notable impact has also been reported on one's career/work environment.)

In particular the research has indicated a significant psychosocial impact on children, adolescents, and their families. Most notably is the considerable effect on daily family activities and socialization in regards to the continuous attention needed to avoid the exposure to allergens for one or more members of the family. The populations most adversely affected are: females, parents of young children, and adolescents. Of these, the most significantly affected is mothers of severely allergic children.



Dr. Stephen Wangen

The **IBS Treatment Center** is the nation's leading facility for the successful treatment of Irritable Bowel Syndrome

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If you or someone you know is affected by food allergies and/or celiac disease, then you may have experienced, or are currently feeling the related adverse impact on quality of life first hand. These impacts can lead to intense fear and anxiety, as well as frustration and anger. Online chat rooms related to these topics are populated with individuals seeking support for these very real emotions.

If you are a parent with a severely allergic child, you know how scary and frightening it can be to take your child to a party, day care, the park, school, or church. As a counselor I have met parents who are so fearful for their child's well-being that they end up isolating the child, themselves, and the entire family unit. While this may guarantee safety, we all know that living in a bubble is not really living. Although great caution and care must always be taken, living with food allergies does not have to mean a life of constant fear.

If you are struggling with overwhelming fear and anxiety regarding your own or someone else's food allergies, and find that it is significantly interfering with your life, this is an indication that seeking outside help would be beneficial. The right kind of emotional and behavioral support will help you to realize that you are not alone, and that what you are feeling is normal given the circumstances. With help you can learn to work around your food restrictions instead of being confined by them.

Having been diagnosed with Celiac Disease as an adult, I can personally relate to the emotions that can accompany living with a serious food allergy. With my own diagnosis came panic over attending social functions. I was overwhelmed by the weight of having to think about every single thing I was eating. Ultimately I found myself not wanting to be around people, not wanting to go out, and feeling sorry for myself. Fortunately, I had great friends in the counseling field (including my significant other) who were able to give me the support and encouragement I needed to feel good about myself again. Also, I was able to do a lot of self work to get through those overwhelming emotions and learned to embrace my new lifestyle in a positive and life changing way.

The psychological effects of living with life changing food restrictions are deep and very real. In my own practice I focus on helping people regain their sense of self, security, and the ability to live a full life despite their dietary restrictions. You do not have to live in fear and be debilitated by anxiety just because you have celiac disease or other food allergies. A diagnosis of a food allergy becomes a part of your life but it does not have to define you. Learning effective ways to manage fears and anxieties will help you get back to living the life you really want -- full of fun, excitement, security, love, and self assurance.

References:

de Blok, M.J., et al. (2007). A framework for measuring the social impact of food allergy across Europe. A EuroPrevall state of the art paper. *Allergy* 62 (7), 733-737.

Cummings, A. J., et al. (2010), The psychosocial impact of food allergy and food hypersensitivity in children, adolescents and their families: a review. *Allergy*, 65: 933-945.

Lee, A., MSED, RD. & Newman, J.M., Phd, RD (2003). Celiac diet: Its impact on quality of life. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. Volume 103, Issue 11, Pages 1533-1535.

This article is courtesy of Jennifer Leeson, LCSW. As a therapist Leeson specializes in working with individuals affected by food allergies. For more information about Jennifer and her services as a counselor please visit www.foodallergytherapist.com.

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The IBS Treatment Center thanks Jenn Leeson for this month's lead article. If you are feeling stress, anxiety, or overwhelming unhappiness caused by your own or your child's food allergies, we encourage you to find the support you need through counseling, therapy, or a local support group.

To find a support group in your area, check out one of the following websites:

Gluten Intolerance Group of North America www.gluten.net

Celiac Sprue Association USA www.csaceliacs.info

The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network www.foodallergy.org

IBS and Central Seattle GIG Support Group

The Food Allergy and Intolerance Foundation (formerly the Innate Health Foundation) sponsors a monthly support group for individuals with IBS, food allergies, and/or gluten intolerance. These support group meetings are open to the public and usually held on the first Tuesday of the month from 6:30-8:00PM at the IBS Treatment Center clinic space. The meetings are fun, educational, and often include delicious allergen free treats. Dr. Wangen attends most meetings and is available to answer questions.

Next Meeting: Tuesday, October 4th from 6:30 to 8 PM.

Note: The clinic and garage entrances are both located at 11301 Pinehurst Way NE Seattle, WA 98125. Look for the IBS Treatment Center and blue parking "P" signs. For more info, please call 206-264-1111.

GLUTEN & ALLERGEN FREE Expo

Presented by
LIVING WITHOUT



The Gluten & Allergen Free Expo in Dallas, TX

Vendor Fair, Cooking Classes, Professional Training
October 1-2, 2011

Tickets for the cooking classes are available until September 15.

Attendees to the cooking classes enjoy free admission to the vendor fair (\$20. value) which is open both days from 10 AM to 4 PM.

Saturday cooking classes

Bread and Beyond & Blissful Baked Goods
(Register for both classes or just one)

Sunday cooking classes

Happy Holidays & Healthy Living (Register for both classes or just one)

Educational classes for professionals

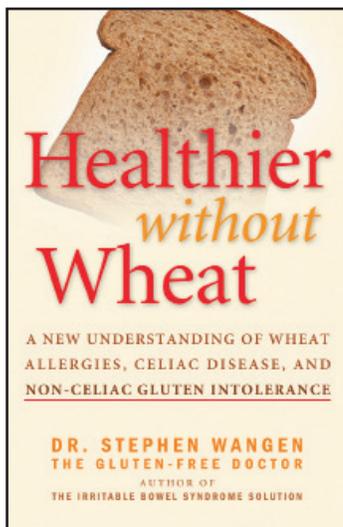
Gluten Free 101 for Dietitians and Nutritionists. Saturday 9 AM - 12 PM

Advanced Course in Food Allergies, Intolerances, and Sensitivities. Saturday 8:30 AM - 5:30 PM

Come be a part of the fun! Learn from the nation's top chefs, nutritionists, and cookbook authors and sample delicious allergen free foods.

For more information and to purchase tickets

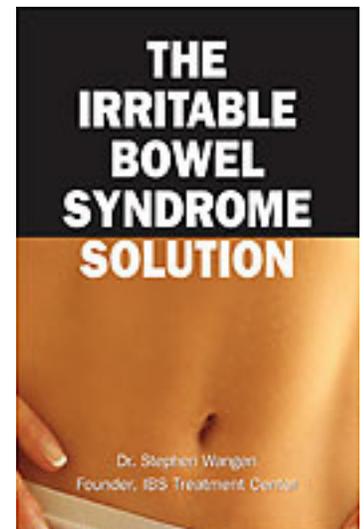
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Books by Dr. Stephen Wangen

Available by calling
(206) 264-1111 or (888) 546-6283 |
or

www.IBSTreatmentCenter.com



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Dr. Stephen Wangen is pleased to announce the following one day professional educational course in Seattle:

Advanced Course in Food Allergies, Intolerances, and Sensitivities

Defining and Evaluating Test Methods & Analysis of Current Research

Saturday, November 19, 2011
Graham Visitors Center at the Arboretum, Seattle, WA
www.InnateHealthClasses.com



Gluten Free Labeling Requirements

The FDA has re-opened the comment period on gluten-free labeling requirements, but it will close again at the end of September.



The IBS Treatment Center's position on this is: **The requirement that products labeled gluten free be tested and shown to have no detectable gluten at or above the detection limit of 20ppm is technologically feasible, financially reasonable, protective of health to an acceptable degree, and should be implemented immediately.**

Please take the time to speak up on this important issue.

FDA Press release: <http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm265838.htm>

LA Times article on the subject:

http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/money_co/2011/09/fda-takes-closer-look-at-gluten-free-labels.html

FDA comment page: <http://www.fda.gov/NewsEvents/Newsroom/PressAnnouncements/ucm265838.htm>