

Gluten changing people's relationship with food

By Roberto A. Ferdman, Washington Post

Gluten, which gives bread, pizza dough and other starchy foods their chewiness, is one of the most beloved proteins in the world. But it's also quickly becoming one of the most feared – at least here in the United States. An estimated 20 million Americans believe that eating it causes them distress. And 100 million people, meanwhile, say that they are actively working to eliminate gluten from their diet.

Roughly 1 percent of humans suffer from celiac disease, an autoimmune disease that damages the body's small intestine when gluten is digested. But the gluten-free movement has gone far beyond those who suffer from celiac, becoming a pervasive part of how Americans eat.

And yet there is a growing sense that people – in particular those who don't suffer from celiac disease – are being a bit ridiculous about avoiding the protein.

Is there a scientific basis for all the gluten fear-mongering? Is it wrong to avoid gluten if avoiding it makes you feel better? And are people actually feeling better, or is it all just in their heads?

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