

Gluten Free Stories from Ireland

The Thinking House

BORD BIA INSIGHT CENTRE

Research Partner: SPARK The Strategic Research Agency



Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Lifestylers **Page 6**

Caroline (Purchaser) & Amy, Lifestyle, Laid back, 45-54 years old, Dublin

Roisin, Lifestyle, Practical, 19-24 years old, Tipperary/ Limerick

Emer, Lifestyle, Careful, 25-34 years old, Dublin

Alison, Lifestyle, Careful, 25-34 years old, Tipperary/ Limerick

Chapter 2: Gluten Intolerant/Sensitive **Page 12**

Deirdre, Intolerant, Laid back, 45-54 years old, Dublin

Sorcha, Intolerant, Practical, 35-44 years old, Clare/ Galway

Rebecca (Purchaser) & David, Intolerant, Careful, 55-64 years old, Tipperary/ Limerick

Linda, Intolerant, Careful, 35-44 years old, Clare/ Galway

Chapter 3: Coeliac Disease/Wheat Allergy **Page 21**

Karl (Purchaser) & Edel, Coeliac, Laid back, 45-54 years old, Clare/ Galway

James, Coeliac, Practical, 35-44 years old, Dublin

Belinda, Coeliac, Practical, 35-44 years old, Clare/ Galway

Mary, Coeliac, Careful, 65+ years old, Dublin

Sally, Coeliac, Careful, 25-34 years old, Tipperary/ Limerick

Julie (Purchaser) & Simon, Coeliac, Careful, 45-54 years old, Clare/ Galway

Pauline (Purchaser) & Keeva, Wheat allergy, Careful, 35-44 years old, Tipperary/ Limerick

This is the first time Bord Bia has looked at the Gluten Free market in Ireland.

We set out to understand the psychology behind why consumers are increasingly choosing Gluten Free lifestyles and what that means for Irish food and drinks companies. Our end focus is around what insights can we provide for Irish food and drink manufacturers about future innovation and positioning of Gluten Free products.

Spark was commissioned to carry out a research project in early 2017. It included four phases:

1) a Situational Analysis of key trends,

2) Key Influencer Interviews,

3) Consumer and Purchaser interviews and

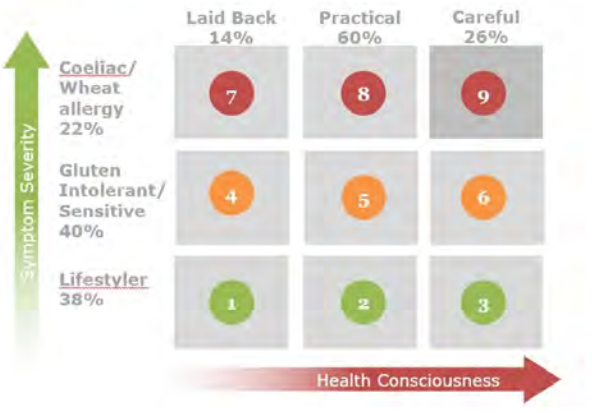
4) A nationally representative online survey.

More information on the Consumer Insight study can be found by emailing thethinkinghouse@bordbia.ie or you can download the full report from bordbia.ie.

This book is made up of the stories from 15 people who are consumers and/or purchasers of Gluten Free products. We asked each person to send us their Gluten Free story in advance of meeting them in person.

This allowed them to tell us their experience with gluten without any moderator intervention. These stories have added to our analysis to help us draw up a picture of how Gluten Free needs vary vastly in Ireland. We've been able to pinpoint nuances in their stories (in conjunction with the follow up face-to-face interviews).

The result is the following matrix:



The storybook has 3 chapters for each of the groups experiencing similar symptoms. How each group approaches choosing Gluten Free is different. Therefore, we have categorised them according to their health consciousness level around what they eat and drink. Some are quite laid back, some are practical and some are very careful.

We follow the flow from the bottom left corner where Caroline is experiencing the least severe symptoms and has a somewhat laid back attitude to healthy food/cooking to the top right corner where Pamela has a child who is experiencing a very severe allergic reaction to wheat and she has a very health conscious attitude to healthy food/cooking.

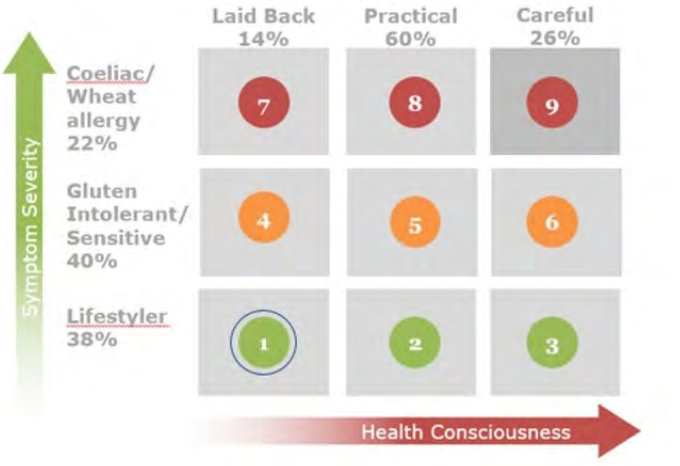
Chapter One: Lifestylers

Lifestylers account for 38% of Gluten Free shoppers in Ireland. They experience either no symptoms or some mild symptoms. Key perceptions among this group is that gluten is bad for them. They believe that eating Gluten Free has health or weight loss benefits or some have heard others talk about benefits. They are the most flexible of the three groups because they do not 'have' to avoid gluten but 'choose' to.



Caroline (Purchaser) & Amy, Lifestyle, Laid back

45-54 years old, Dublin



"Hi my name is Caroline. Here is just a little bit about myself. I have struggled with my weight after my children were born. I have 3 children (12-19). I was always very active and then through the years wondered why my energy levels were getting lower. Life was getting busier and so we went with the flow.

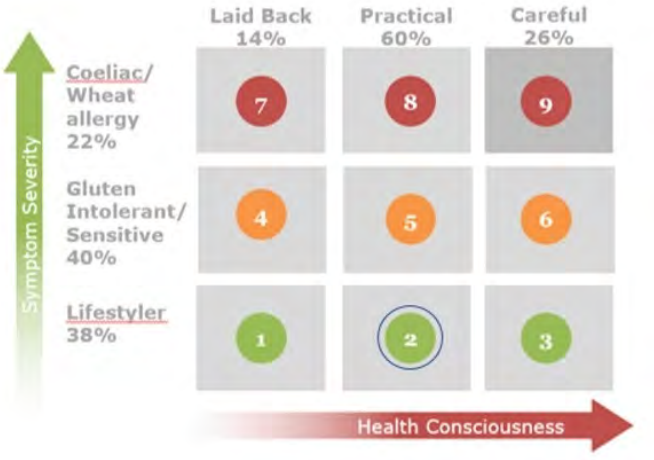
I like walking with Amy. We enjoy our chats and girlie stuff. I work in a school and have fantastic friends; I think we all learn from each other. One day one of my friends asked me what was wrong and I told her I was feeling old. We had a chat and my friend told me to try Gluten Free to see if it made a difference. I was never tested. I took it upon myself to change. That's how I started on this trip as I call it. I think there is such a difference when we eat the wrong food and it is nicer to feel good.

Hi my name is Amy. I am Caroline's daughter. I am 12 years of age. My mum spoke to me about writing these letters so I don't know where to start. Me and my mum are very close. We talk a lot. My mum likes me to eat Gluten Free bread as I notice the difference if I eat ordinary bread. I feel tired and sometimes my mood changes. It took a while for me to like the bread as sometimes it tastes like cardboard but we dress it up. We eat a lot of pasta dishes and mum uses Gluten Free pasta and I do not notice any difference. I also like the cookies and biscuits so I can have an extra one. I was never tested either I just listen to my mum. We did try a test out years ago. I think I was around 10. I ate ordinary bread for a week and then went on to Gluten Free. If I can remember, the week I ate Gluten Free was the week that I did a lot more and felt better."

Roisin, Lifestyle, Practical

19-24 years old, Tipperary/ Limerick

"I was 17 when I started to get very tired a lot of the time (I put it down to studying lots for my leaving cert mock exams) but then in the middle of Rugby matches I would become exhausted and have to stop playing as I physically could not stand up. After about ten minutes I would feel fine again and go back and the exhaustion would repeat.



I found it very annoying as I wasn't playing to my potential and it was affecting the team and it was also confusing as I knew I wasn't sick.

I went to the doctor (which I never do) and blood tests revealed I was low in iron but I was told I had "nothing to worry about" and would be better soon. I waited a few weeks and nothing changed so I went to a kinesiologist who did tests that revealed I was wheat intolerant. This meant I could have no wheat but I could have certain low gluten foods such as spelt.

The high gluten content in wheat was preventing my body from absorbing iron

and magnesium (hence no energy as no oxygen getting to your muscles when they were under pressure). It felt good to know there was nothing wrong with me and that I had a way to get better.

I immediately stopped all wheat intake and used spelt based products where possible, but for certain things I have to have Gluten Free. After six weeks I was able to play a full match with no issues or tiredness and I was much more awake during the day.

Having a Wheat Free diet does not bother me too much as when at home I have all the foods I need. But if I'm eating out it can be difficult as some places have no Gluten Free option (or if there is one it is not advertised).

For two years now I've been wheat free and I'm fine about it and I feel 100 times better!"

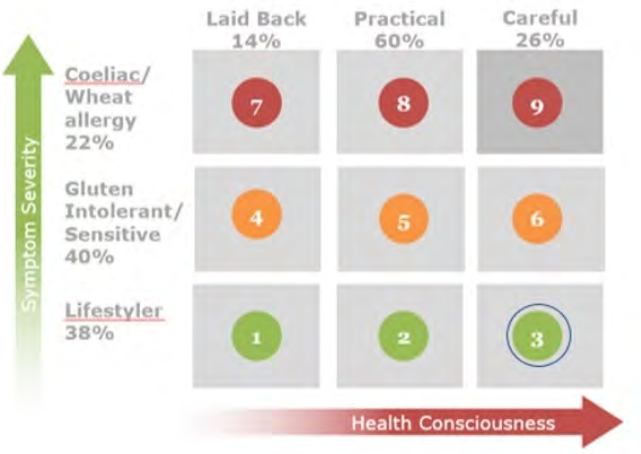


Emer, Lifestyle, Careful

25-34 years old, Dublin

"Why I decided to follow a Gluten Free lifestyle:

I started to follow a Gluten Free lifestyle about two years ago. At the time, I had a few extra pounds on and I felt like my energy levels were poor and I was very prone to abdominal bloating and would have episodes of 'upset stomach'.



A few of my friends had tried the Gluten Free diet and had got very good results so I thought that I would give it a try.

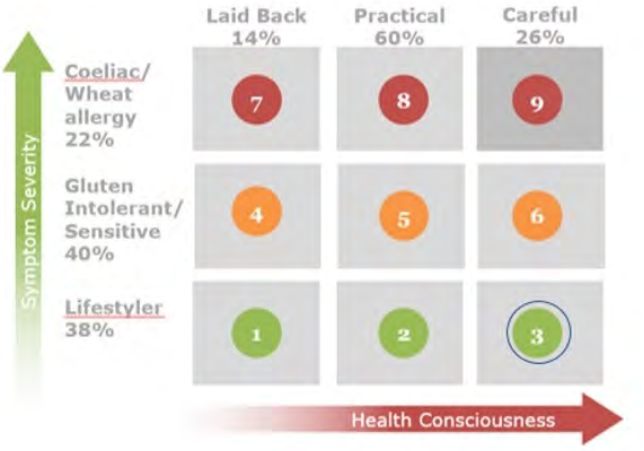
I've never got any formal tests done for gluten or wheat intolerance. I felt like I got good results from the diet after about 2 weeks. The 1st week was tough because I was craving white bread and biscuits but I persisted and it paid off.

I used to always have toast or cereal in the morning and I switched to porridge. Instead of having a sandwich for lunch I started having large salads with plenty of potatoes and for dinner I started to stay away from rice, pasta and pizza. I would have rice/corn cakes, fruit, chocolate and natural yogurt for snacks during the day.

If I was on a night out I'd stick to vodka and a mixer to avoid wheat/gluten."

Alison, Lifestyle, Careful

25-34 years old, Tipperary/ Limerick



"I chose to go Gluten Free in my college years. (10 years ago). When I went to college I found that I felt my lifestyle needed to be healthier and I had to take responsibility and make a more conscious effort with my health. I found that when I ate certain foods (bread, pasta, processed foods) I suffered from stomach cramps, bloating for hours, digestive problems and headaches. As I result I would avoid wheat based products as this was proving to be causing me some issues. For my carbohydrate intake I would have organic oats and Greek yogurt for breakfast and rice or quinoa for lunch with salad. My diet had lots of fruit and veg with fish/chicken/eggs/avocado some days.

I have Gluten Free bread and pasta as an alternative to wheat products. I make sauces from scratch.

I went to see a herbalist who did some food allergy tests and I was advised to stay away from wheat products and choose all Gluten Free to relieve some of my symptoms. I don't have any wheat products and I limit dairy products. I feel I have far more energy. I used to suffer with energy slumps and fatigue a lot in my college and school years. I am a very active person and my health and fitness plays a big role in my life and in order to ensure I can be at peak fitness I choose to follow my healthy plan and avoid all wheat products and choose Gluten Free alternatives."

Chapter 2: Gluten Intolerant / sensitive

These account for 40% of Gluten Free shoppers. They experience symptoms when they eat gluten and some may have been tested medically/non-medically. This group is probably the most frustrated of the three because they do not have a medically recognised diagnosis as even those with Irritable Bowel Syndrome do not feel it gets to the root of the problem.

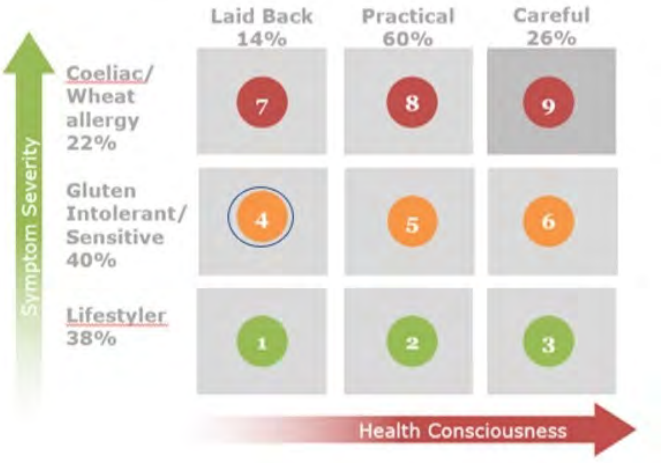


Deirdre, Intolerant, Laid back

45-54 years old, Dublin

"Just a little bit on the history as to why I am Gluten Free.

Two years ago I was experiencing stomach problems. After a few trips to the GP, I was sent away with prescriptions on a trial basis.



Having spent a few months trying different meds I was sent away for the camera where it was discovered I have inflammatory bowel disease.

I was advised by the dietician to go on a white diet and a Gluten Free diet. I have found both very difficult to get used to as I am a bit of a fussy eater so I don't like certain foods.

I have been doing both for over a year now. I find it difficult to manage when going to people's houses and going out to dinner. When I go to someone's house I try not to make a fuss about it as I am a plain eater and people are always trying to accommodate me.

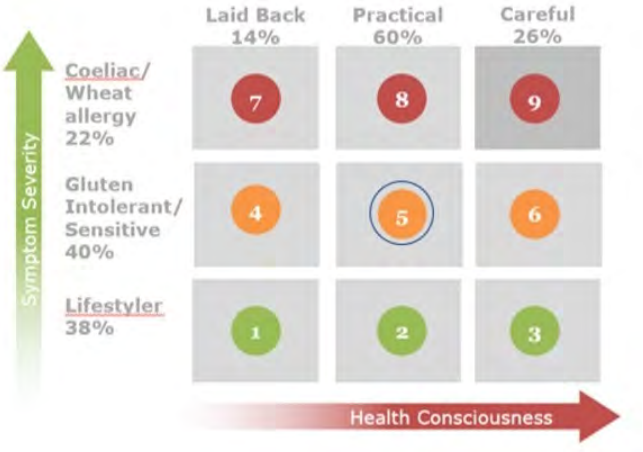
I end up saying nothing to be honest. I come away feeling bloated and sometimes a little unwell depending on what I have eaten.

Shopping for food used to be difficult as I had to read the ingredients on everything but now I just buy the same food stuff weekly."

Sorcha, Intolerant, Practical

35-44 years old, Clare/ Galway

"My symptoms would often flare up and recede, and I never really kept track of why it was happening. I suppose I used to think it was just weight. In 2013 I had abdominal surgery for uterine fibroids and ovarian cysts.



Since the surgery, I am more conscious of bloating when it occurs, and I notice pain in my left lower abdomen, which I have been trying to identify with my doctor. Having ruled out another ovarian cyst with ultra sound and having had a colonoscopy and endoscopy (Feb 2016), it seems that there are no obstructions in my gut, and everything looks ok. I have been tested for Coeliac disease, and the tests were negative. I went to see a food allergy tester, who also practices acupuncture, Chinese herbal medicine and iridology.

She confirmed that I was gluten intolerant and I went on a diet that was Gluten Free for a month. It was also sugar free and dairy free. I felt terrible for the first week, extremely fatigued and foggy brained. Then it cleared and I started to feel better and better. My stomach bloating completely disappeared. I noticed that my mood was more stable, and the nagging anxiety I often experienced also went away. The dark circles under my eyes also went away, and I started to look brighter, to the point that I could see it myself in the morning.

The tiredness was gone from my face. I felt great and people remarked on how different I looked. The stiffness and pain in my hands, wrists and hips eased off.



I also noticed that the nagging pain in the lower left abdomen disappeared.

Hard to imagine that I let the diet slip, but I did... I have managed to stick to it on and off, but I really notice when I fall off the wagon and start eating croissants or pasta... instant bloating, pain in my left abdomen, stiffness in my hands on waking in the morning, and a look and feel of tiredness in my face. Also, constipation and general sense of irritable bowel syndrome. This puts me off eating properly, and a cycle perpetuates.

It takes a new resolve every time to come back to the Gluten Free diet. It can be hard to see it through when a guest at someone's house or eating out. Although, I notice so many more Gluten Free options now, compared to 5/10 years ago. When bloated, I obviously don't fit into my clothes so well, which doesn't feel so good for morale or self image. It makes me feel old and uncomfortable in my body. I like to swim, dance, cycle, walk and do yoga. When I am bloated none of this feels so appealing.

The bloatedness feels like stagnation, and perhaps chronic inflammation. I feel it in my joints, my stomach and I feel that it influences my mood for sure.

It's been great to discover what I can do to manage my symptoms, and I am so glad it isn't something more serious. I work as a therapist and notice many of my clients with possibly gluten intolerance symptoms... the bloating and achey joints.

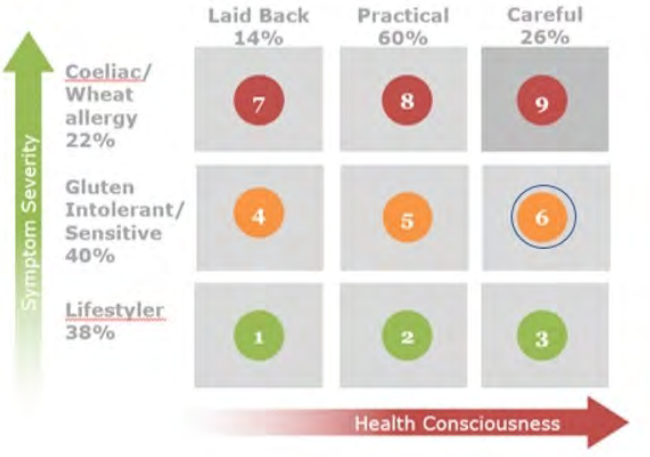
I substitute with Gluten Free oats and oatcakes, corn and rice cakes, buckwheat pasta and spelt bread (I am not totally sure if I tolerate spelt bread, it's a bit borderline). Once I am on the programme, it doesn't bother me to miss out on things like pastries or cakes etc...because I am feeling so good. It seems important to plan meals ahead and take lunch boxes to work. Planning helps immensely."



Rebecca (Purchaser) & David, Intolerant, Careful

55-64 years old, Tipperary/Limerick

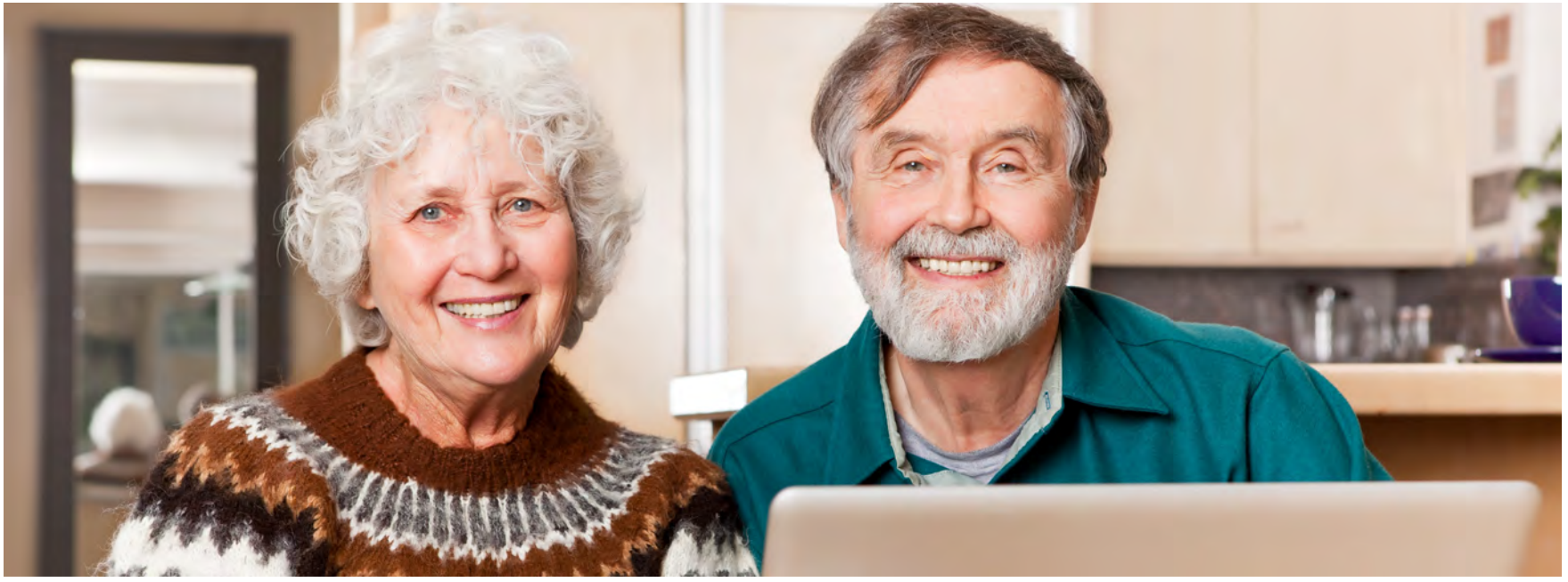
"This diary relates to my husband who seems to have an intolerance to Gluten (well not 100% sure really) but here's his story.



For a while he had been feeling bloated and complaining with bad toilet problems. For example, constipated one minute then extremely loose motions the next minute. This was upsetting him so I told him to make an appointment and to get it checked so he did.

He went for a full physical with the Doctor in 2010. All of the tests were good and then he spoke to her about his bloatedness and toilet problems. She suggested that he have a colonoscopy and endoscopy to rule out anything serious and this test showed nothing untoward.

When he returned for his consultation, she confirmed this and spoke a little more in depth about his eating habits etc. She advised him to avoid gluten and to make a food diary to see if he could recognise any triggers.



His diet was not bad to begin with so it was easy to make little changes. He changed cereal to a Gluten Free type and used almond milk. He stopped eating bread, he tried the Gluten Free bread but we haven't found one he really likes yet. Dinner consisted of fish, meat and veg and Gluten Free savoury gravy.

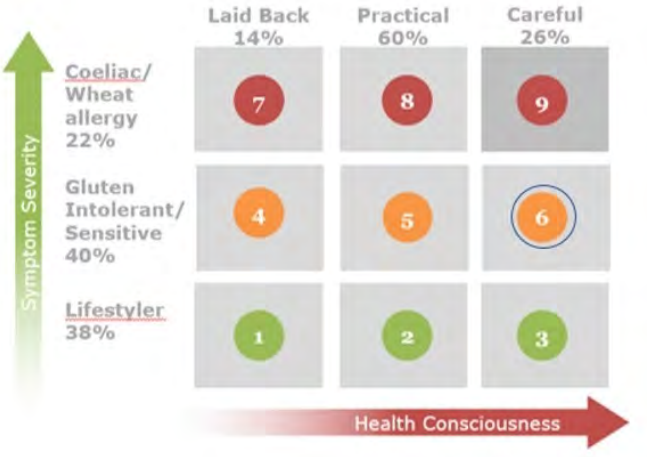
Snacks are usually rice cakes with yogurt, sometimes I buy Gluten Free biscuits or snack bars which taste quite nice.

Overall the change to Gluten Free for him hasn't been all that difficult but he still complains with bloatedness, so the jury is still out whether he is gluten intolerant or not. We are currently awaiting an appointment to discuss this further."

Linda, Intolerant, Careful

35-44 years old, Clare/ Galway

"My gluten intolerance experience to date. In 2009 I began to experience extreme fatigue, muscular weakness, aches, pains, stomach cramps, bloating, acid reflux, memory difficulties, concentration problems, anxiety and depression amongst a long list of symptoms.



I was initially referred to a gastroenterologist who recommended a hospital stay for extensive testing. After a number of hospital stays over the next couple of years with varying opinions, they gave me no official diagnosis.

Eventually my G.P. referred me to a Rheumatologist I had not seen before, he diagnosed me with Fibromyalgia. It was a relief to finally have a definitive diagnosis even though there was little he could do to help me other than that.

Life had become difficult to manage and unpleasant overall. No medication that I was given at that time seemed to help very much.

A friend of mine told me about an allergy doctor who had had some success in treating people with Fibromyalgia/CFS/ME. In desperation I rang an allergist based in Galway, and made an appointment. The first thing he did was give me multiple skin prick allergy tests all of which came up negative.



He said that as they can come up as a false negative and given the symptoms I was experiencing it would be advisable to do an elimination diet. I followed a series of elimination diets under his guidance and we discovered that I was allergic to oranges, and intolerant to wheat/gluten and dairy. I feel better than before and my symptoms are reduced when I stay away from those foods.

According to the doctor my fibromyalgia condition isn't solely caused by these foods but they greatly aggravate, increase and create symptoms. Life continues to be difficult to manage on a daily basis but is somewhat less difficult thanks to my doctor.

I currently follow a gluten wheat and dairy free diet along with taking medication and supplements."

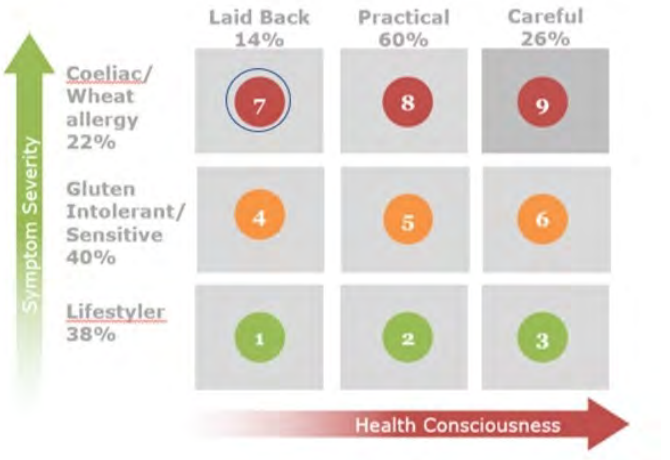
Chapter 3: Coeliac Disease/Wheat Allergy

The third group have been diagnosed with Coeliac disease or with a Wheat allergy and account for 22% of Gluten Free shoppers. They experience very intense symptoms and have been medically diagnosed. They are given recognition for their condition and receive ongoing support for example through dieticians.



Karl (Purchaser) & Edel, Coeliac, Laid back

45-54 years old, Clare/ Galway



"I was diagnosed a Coeliac in 2008, aged 42. As a child and as a young adult I had no symptoms whatsoever. Around 1998 I noticed that I kept getting bad bouts of heart burn. I noticed that it was particularly bad after a pint or two. I tried various over the counter medicines to help. Eventually, I underwent a colonoscopy.

An ulcer was diagnosed. For the next 10 years I thought that I suffered from ulcers and needed to be careful about what I drank and ate. I lost weight gradually during these years. By 2008 I was skin and bone. I also started to get dizzy spells. It was at this stage that I decided that it needed further investigation.

My daughter had been diagnosed a Coeliac in 2002 (aged 4) so the doctor suggested we test for Coeliac disease while testing for everything else. Tests also confirmed that I had Coeliac disease. I wasn't surprised or too put out. As my daughter was a Coeliac we were well up on the products available and more importantly which foods and products to avoid. After 3 weeks on a Gluten-Free diet I started to feel better and put on weight. The heart-burn disappeared, I had more energy. The learning and changes had really come into effect when my daughter was diagnosed in 2002. Shopping took ages at the start because we had to read the ingredients in nearly everything we bought.

We also joined The Coeliac Society of Ireland. They publish a booklet every year that lists Gluten-Free products / Coeliac-friendly restaurants etc. Shops and restaurants didn't cater as well for Coeliacs in 2002. This has all changed in the years since then.

All supermarkets carry a good and varied range of Gluten-Free foods now.

Nearly all restaurants in Ireland (and most that we have visited in France / Spain) can cater easily for our needs. I am not a fussy eater and will eat nearly anything that is Gluten-Free which is handy! Sometimes there will only be one / two options on a menu. Awareness has improved in a large part due to fad dieting.

Many people avoid gluten these days though they don't need to. Some say that this is not beneficial to Coeliacs who have no choice but to avoid gluten.

They say that chefs / cooks may not be as careful in preparing food if they assume that their clientele are just being 'fussy' or don't need to avoid gluten.

Personally, I think that it has helped our cause. I've never had a reaction after a meal in any restaurant which leads me to believe that chefs take care to avoid contamination.



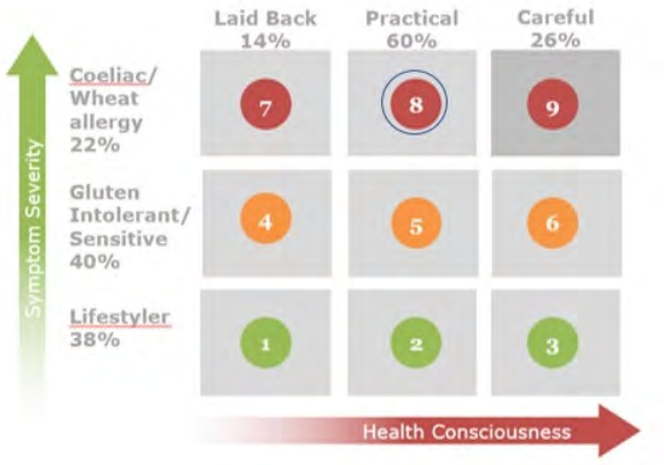
At worst, Coeliac disease is an inconvenience. It has never bothered me. Checking ingredients and scanning menus for Gluten-Free options has become second nature. As I said earlier, as long as I can find one option I'm happy. I stick to the diet fairly rigidly. I will sometimes try something that 'May Contain Traces of Gluten' and have yet to have a bad reaction."



James, Coeliac, Practical

35-44 years old, Dublin

"Gluten Free! Why Me? In October 2013 I was getting a full set of bloods taken by my GP for a general check-up. About a week later I went back for the results and was amazed to hear that Coeliac disease had shown up in the results.



I genuinely thought a mistake had been made as I didn't have the usual effects of a person with Coeliac disease. I was then sent for an endoscopy which confirmed I am coeliac. I then met with a dietician who explained the types of foods I can eat and the types I should avoid. Next step was to get a DEXA scan to gauge the levels of calcium I need to take every week as coeliacs are prone to osteoporosis.

While I'm very good at sticking to a Gluten Free diet I'm not so good at taking the calcium supplements.

While I said it was a surprise to be diagnosed as Coeliac because I didn't have the usual effects of a person with the disease, once I went on a Gluten Free diet the changes were noticeable very quickly. The most noticeable was I had to replace most of my trousers, not from losing weight but because I was bloated from eating gluten and when I stopped the bloating went away. I now can very easily tell if I have eaten gluten because my stomach can actually hurt when I do.

Pros

Eat less takeaway foods

Healthier lifestyle

Cons

Very difficult to get nice bread

Perceived as a fussy eater

Difficult to "eat on the go"

Feeling unwell when I eat gluten

Have to check labels on everything

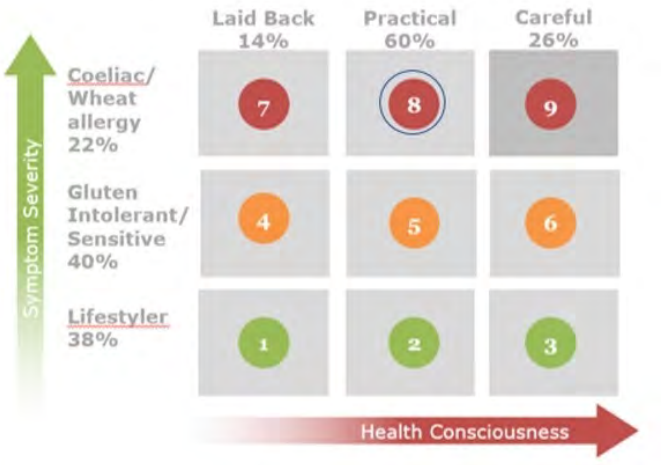
Of all the foods that are made for the Gluten Free market I think bread must be the most important but the one that companies cannot get right the most."



Belinda, Coeliac, Practical

35-44 years old, Clare/ Galway

"My name is Belinda and I was a chef for years. I worked my way through my apprenticeship and I always thought it was because I had to constantly taste the food I cooked that I got a runny tummy. I had mentioned it to my doctor at the time.



He said I was to make an effort to eat regular meals and because my job was with food, the last thing I wanted to do on my break was eat. So, I guess I just got used to it and put up with it.

My symptoms were a constant runny tummy and violent headaches. Sometimes my diarrhoea was so bad I'd have to get off the train and go find a loo. I was often late for work. I don't know now how or why someone didn't tell me to get checked out. It wasn't till I came back to work in Ireland that the mummies who worked in the kitchen said I was too young to be running to the toilet all the time.

I did go to a doctor but again received the same advice and told to drink less (alcohol). After quite a few years I met someone and became pregnant a few years later.

Once I became pregnant I stopped drinking, smoking and for the first time in my life started to look after myself, eat well and regular. I still suffered from my tummy. My doctor said it was possible I had an ulcer and we could check for that after the birth.



After my son was born I breastfed him so I kept an even better diet.

I went to an acupuncturist for my back. She said I had a blocked tummy and I should get a blood test for Coeliac disease.

My doctor said that I was wasting my time but did it and it came back positive. I went to a clinic twice, had my blood taken and was given advice before the clinic was cancelled.

When the camera test came up I didn't have it because I was pregnant again. I had been following the diet and for the first time in my life put on weight, was feeling good and I didn't think I needed any help. I had bought a few books and educated myself on Gluten Free.

Two years ago after a very stressful phase of my life, my symptoms came back. My partner got very sick and I had not been able to eat regularly. I was in and out to the hospital for 8 weeks and I was running on coffee.

I now had 3 kids: 4,7,10 and a farm to run. His recovery was slow and he was worried about my tummy so I told my doctor and he booked me for an ultrasound camera test but found nothing. A MRI also found nothing.

He then sent me to the Coeliac clinic who put me back on gluten, redid the camera test and found a tummy ulcer. I was definitely a Coeliac and gladly went back to Gluten Free.

I don't drink or smoke so my doctor said cut out the coffee due to the ulcer and all has settled down again now.

Having been put back on gluten I won't be saying poor me anymore as the discomfort isn't worth it. I am lucky because I'm a good chef.

I don't rate what is available to buy but it is getting better and more importantly people are more aware now. I still miss some foods that have a few processes and are difficult to reproduce Gluten Free."

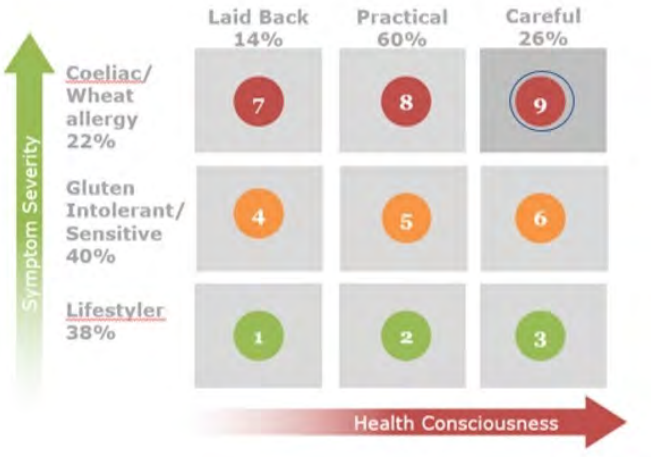


Mary, Coeliac, Careful

65+ years old, Dublin

"My name is Mary, I am 75 years old. I have 5 children and enjoy good health.

My Gluten Free story started as follows. Over my life I have always been a tall thin woman and even as a child I would have found it difficult to put on weight.



In my 50s and 60s I would have attended my GP regularly with a low HB and deficiency in Vitamin B12. Intermittently I would have been prescribed iron tablets and B12 injections.

In 1994 when attending my GP with similar symptoms as above and I was referred to a haematologist to have a look at my full blood count. Following a consultation in the Mater hospital it was recommended that I attend a Gastroenterologist. Having attended this clinic I had an OGD and biopsy.

The biopsy diagnosed Coeliac disease and I commenced a Gluten Free diet immediately.

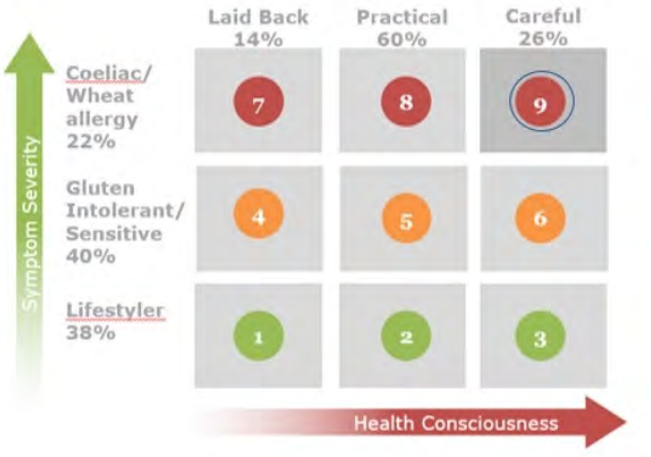
Since diagnosis I have noticed a significant difference in my general health. I particularly noticed an improvement in my energy levels, stronger hair and nails and a significant improvement in my blood picture. I am very compliant with my diet and watch everything that I eat especially when eating out.

My daughter was also diagnosed as an adult at 32 years old."

Sally, Coeliac, Careful

25-34 years old, Tipperary/ Limerick

"I was diagnosed as Coeliac in September 2002. I was 19 years old and a student at the time. I had always been very active growing up. I was a very healthy child and had never shown any signs of being Coeliac until my late teens.



In the months leading up to my diagnosis I had tummy pains, cramping and bloating and I would sometimes be doubled over in pain. As the pains became worse and more frequent I visited my GP who asked questions about my general wellbeing and ran some tests. I was shocked a week later when my GP called to say my bloods had tested positive for Coeliac disease.

I had never even been aware of the condition or heard of anyone with it but it was a relief to know that by following a Gluten Free diet I should feel better. I immediately got to learning everything I needed to know about the Gluten Free diet. As daunting as it seemed to have to give up staples like bread, pasta, pizza and all the other foods that could have hidden gluten, I had been feeling so unwell in the months previous that I was willing to try anything and it didn't seem so bad. Once I began the Gluten Free diet the difference was almost instant. I felt so much better and I have never looked back.



It was difficult to get nice Gluten Free food at the time. The only Gluten Free bread available was dry and crumbly and the selection was very limited.

Over the years the availability and quality of Gluten Free food has improved ten-fold and nearly every shop and supermarket now has a special 'Free From' food section and the selection is huge.

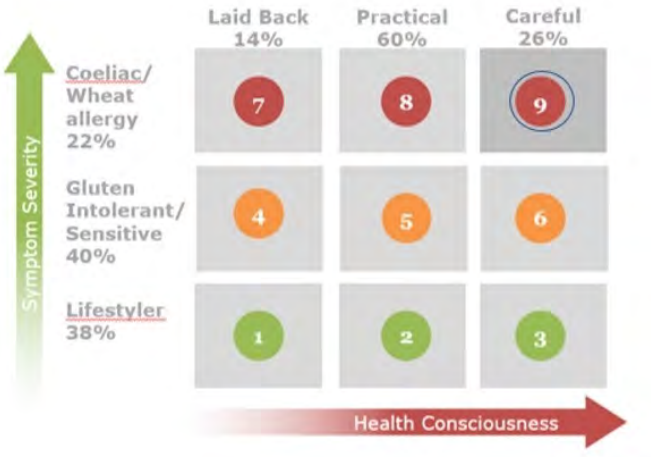
I love to eat out and I find restaurants are so much more aware of Gluten Free foods these days however I am always extra careful as the necessity for Gluten Free food being a Coeliac as opposed to the trend of people just following the diet can be confusing for catering staff.

I find when travelling and eating out it's best to be prepared. I look up menus online in advance or bring some snacks myself for flights or train journeys. That way I won't go hungry if there's nothing available!"

Julie (Purchaser) & Simon, Coeliac, Careful

45-54 years old, Clare/ Galway

"I am gluten intolerant and have been Gluten Free for the last three years. Three and a half years ago I was admitted to hospital with a suspected stroke. Thankfully I had a massive silent migraine and I was also told that my thyroid was possibly hypothyroid.



My doctor subsequently did a test and discovered that I had thyroid antibodies and was in the early stages of Hashimoto's, autoimmune thyroid disease.

I realised that I needed to pay serious attention to my health and I started researching Hashimoto's disease. I kept reading that there was a connection with gluten intolerance and that both the progression and symptoms of the disease could be improved by following a Gluten Free diet. So I started reducing and then eliminating gluten from my diet. My son had been a Coeliac for six years at this point so I was used to making Gluten Free food and the difference in his health was very dramatic.

It was difficult following a Gluten Free diet at times but as I have realised the benefits and as Gluten Free food is more widely available it has been easier to be Gluten Free.

My digestive system works better, I have less abdominal pain and less constipation. My hormonal system is better and I have less headaches and fatigue. My mood and energy levels are also affected positively by being Gluten Free.

In the last three years I have been diagnosed with other autoimmune diseases and I have done a fair bit of reading on immunity and autoimmunity and the role of gluten continues to feature quite a bit.

When my son was diagnosed as a baby, I was still breastfeeding him and I had to eliminate gluten from my diet overnight for the few months while I was still breastfeeding. I found that really difficult as it was hard to find alternatives and I felt hungry a lot of the time. I found social occasions surrounding food particularly challenging as I could eat very little. There were one or two family occasions where I felt totally isolated as I was the only one at a party not eating.

A lot has changed in ten years, both in terms of the understanding of gluten intolerance and also in the availability of high quality reasonably priced Gluten Free options. I found it tiring explaining to people why my son and I could not eat anything. I felt that many people thought it was all in my imagination.



While I did feel better on a Gluten Free diet, when I stopped breastfeeding, I started eating gluten again. It was too hard to cater for both my son and myself as he had other allergies besides gluten.

At this stage I have found a lot of recipes that are truly delicious. Being Gluten Free has challenged me to be healthier in general. My son was very anaemic as a baby and I am very aware now of iron and B12 levels both for myself and my son. I see him thriving and neither his physical nor mental development were affected.

I no longer feel excluded from social occasions. That said, I spend a huge amount of time cooking and baking and travelling demands a very high level of organisation. We normally drive wherever we are going so that we can bring large amounts of food with us. I rarely leave the house without food supplies. When we are travelling, I spend a lot of time organising bringing the essential Gluten Free foods with us and also in researching where I might be able to source food when abroad. I also learn the local languages in relation to ingredients so that I can read what is in the food wherever we are. There is a lot of potential stress involved in eating Gluten Free and I work hard to keep that to a minimum by being very organised and very creative in making and sourcing delicious food.

I am fortunate in that I live very close to an incredible health food shop and even ten years ago I was able to source the oddest of ingredients. The staff have also been excellent in tracking down information on things like vitamin supplements etc and in sourcing new products for me. Their advice has been invaluable and the manager of the shop is now a very good friend. I have spent a small fortune on Gluten Free food over the years and I am very glad to see that prices are much more reasonable and also that Gluten Free food is now widely available. We eat Gluten Free food predominantly as a family. My biggest shopping bill per week is in the health food shop but I buy Gluten Free products in several supermarkets as well.



My father-in-law was a Coeliac and now most of my husband's family have adopted a Gluten Free diet for a variety of health reasons. Most of our family occasions are Gluten Free. It is so much easier to be Gluten Free now and most restaurants and cafes offer a Gluten Free option. Also, the fact that people understand it now is very helpful and has meant that I no longer feel isolated or like a crackpot because my son or I are Gluten Free.

<u>Section written by my son, Simon, who is a diagnosed Coeliac:</u>

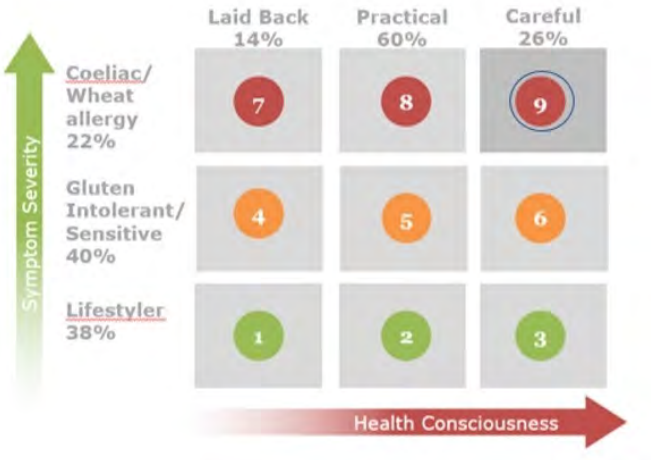
When I first went to school, my friends were eating lots of yummy food that I was not allowed to eat. It took time for me to realise that the reason I was not allowed to eat this food was because my parents cared about my health and food with gluten makes me very sick.

I am now happy to be Gluten Free. It makes no difference because now the same foods are available in Gluten Free versions. Even though I do not know what bread with gluten tastes like, I really like the Gluten Free bread. And I also think that being Gluten Free benefits me."



Pauline (Purchaser) & Keeva, Wheat allergy, Careful

35-44 years old, Tipperary/ Limerick



"My eldest daughter was born in early 2007.

As weaning began when she was 5 months we noticed that she was vomiting frequently with spots on her face after eating certain foods.

At 6 months we spent days in hospital after feeding her Farleys Rusk. Allergy testing was done at the time but came back negative.

At 10 months while holidaying in Kerry my daughter had another reaction after eating a baby bowl of potato and vegetables with soup on top. She was covered in a rash and her mouth was visibly swollen. This resulted in days in hospital and at that time she was diagnosed after bloods as allergic to Wheat/ Gluten. We were prescribed an Anapen Junior in case of another serious reaction and have followed a Gluten Free diet since.

When my daughter was 7 years old we heard of a paediatric allergy specialist and arranged a private appointment to identify if this was something that my daughter would grow out of.

He diagnosed a persisting IgE medicated wheat allergy and asked us to reintroduce wheat in small amounts which we tried unsuccessfully.

Since being diagnosed we have had difficulty finding foods that she likes and tend to stick to the same products in our weekly shop. A lot of Gluten Free foods are high in sugar content so we have to watch the intake of treats which we find a challenge."



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