

A glimpse into a parent's journey converting family to gluten-free diet

By Nancy Ludwig, MS, RDN, LD, Head Start Consulting Nutritionist

As my role as a consultant nutritionist to Siletz Tribal Head Start, I offer information for families. The experience of considering a gluten-free diet for children or a family is usually overwhelming, but often makes a difference in health and behavior.

Below is an interview with a mother who shares her journey into a diet that went even beyond gluten-free. I share this because the many nutrition choices people make today under the names "gluten-free" and/or "Paleo" actually move toward nutritional equivalence of traditional diets. I've used the title "Mom" in this interview.

I invite you to take the journey in her shoes while considering whether any of the described shifts in food intake may be of benefit to you and your family.

This mother of two young children went the extra mile to support her family. Benefits were apparent quickly, but it wasn't always easy. Some of the changes were made more gradually in stages.

Over the course of 2½ years as this family adjusted, they went beyond gluten-free to eliminate dairy, egg, peanut and nightshades. They are currently 100 percent gluten-free and 75-80 percent Paleo (grain-free).

Not everyone in the family has the same needs, but they have found many favorite foods and enjoy increased health.

I would like to share a glimpse into this family's story through the following interview:

Q: What caused you to consider going gluten-free with your children?

Mom: My first child was colicky, I mean really colicky. She was a screamer for nine months and was falling off the growth charts. She was prescribed Zantac for acid reflux and told she would grow out of the colic. She also was constipated and on Miralax from 18 months to almost 3 years. She also got ear infections at least once per year.

My next child had a different temperament. From the age of 3-9 months, she

had a constant runny nose and thrush. Both girls had runny noses for six months! During this time, my oldest was still not eating much and not sleeping through the night. She was 2½ by then.

This was when a friend asked if I had ever considered trying a gluten-free diet. After one-month of gluten-free, we also removed dairy and many symptoms began improving, including my oldest child sleeping through the night for the first time.

Q: Did you do any medical testing?

Mom: Yes. The children and I were tested for genetic markers. I had one for celiac and another for non-celiac gluten sensitivity. My children each had two different gluten-sensitive genes that had to have come from their dad (who wasn't tested because, of course, "he didn't have any problems").

I also had another blood test from my general doctor. On the day I was there, a medical student was observing. He shared with my doctor that he had just attended a seminar and learned that gluten issues were becoming a key medical discovery – like diabetes was in the 1980s. This seemed to open the door for my doctor to consider the gluten-free diet, even if the test was negative.

Q: How did you get your children to cooperate?

Mom: Well, my girls were pretty young, so in some ways it was easier than with older children. Social situations are still hard for them. However, I get them in the kitchen regularly to help with food preparation, even if it is just mixing and stirring. It really helps with their interest and willingness to eat and to try new foods.

I made the changes in stages and I found this to be really important. With children in middle school or older, it might be best not to go cold turkey but to phase in with 1-2 meals per week at first to get used to the new foods.

It is important to teach kids about foods and help them figure out when their symptoms are related to the foods they

eat so that they can participate in making good choices.

Q: How did your husband feel about this venture?

Mom: As I said earlier, he didn't believe that he had any symptoms so he wasn't fully on board at first. He believed that if one person in the family couldn't eat a food, then we all needed to support them and eliminate the item, especially when together.

When he figured out that he was very sensitive to dairy, the diet got his attention. His symptoms included a bumpy rash, sinus drip and intestinal issues (that he didn't talk about much). He followed the diet at home with me doing the food preparation, but he ate differently away from home for a while. It wasn't until we began to try more Paleo recipes that he fully got on board.

He found the Paleo diet to be more positive and he actually liked the recipes better. The foods that we ate on this diet were less processed and we began to have better results – especially when we limited the sugar.

My husband and I have been losing weight, especially in the last six months, and are not even restricting our intake. We are happy about it. Admittedly, when my husband deviates from the diet, he can recreate his symptoms!

Q: What about your family and friends – are they supportive?

Mom: I'm active in social groups with moms and children, and we are some of the few eating this way. My extended family has been slower to support our gluten-free diet.

I find support in blogs and my GIG support group. I do a lot of reading on my own. Support is important and I wish there was more support for families.

Q: What advice do you have for others?

Mom: I want to help others. However, I'm learning not to be pushy about it. Sometimes people need to hear the information many times before they are ready to act.

Avoiding gluten, dairy and other foods has really helped my family to be healthy. I am grateful that a friend of mine suggested the idea to me when I was struggling. I would suggest for parents to keep an open mind as the diet is not as restrictive as some may think.

Siletz Tribal Head Start offers my time at no cost to you to support family nutrition over the telephone. Please contact me if you have nutrition concerns about your head start child.

Organizations for support

gluten.org – Gluten Intolerance Group (GIG), memberships, getting started guides, national list of certified GF restaurants and local support groups (find the link to your branch in Lincoln County, Portland, Salem, McMinnville and Eugene)

Recipe sources/blogs

thepaleomom.com/ – Best recipes and a scientific explanation/blog posts about why people respond to food in certain ways, focus on treating autoimmune disease. Favorites: Hidden Liver Meatloaf, Vanilla Cake, Paleo Gingerbread Cutouts
paleoparents.com/, paleoparents.com/tag/recipe/ or paleoparents.com/blog/ – authors of Eat Like a Dinosaur, terrific resource for kid/meal ideas. List of lunchbox ideas to replicate common kid foods. Favorites: Meatloaf Cupcakes, Buffalo in a Pig Blanket, Rat on a Stick, Coconut Pecan Date Rolls

Come to pow-wow dance class

Tony Whitehead and Sara Bell-Tellez will conduct a pow-wow dance class on April 20 from 5-7 p.m. at the Siletz Tribal Community Center. Tribal members and their families are welcome to attend.



Submitted by Patti McKinney, TPEP Coordinator

The number of poison center calls involving e-cigarettes went from one call per month in September 2010 to 215 calls per month in February 2014.



Courtesy photo by Andrea Suitter

Lincoln County Commissioner Bill Hall reads to Tribal Head Start students in Siletz on March 9.