

## Guest Interview - Melissa Diane Smith author of *Gluten Free Throughout the Year*

Melissa Diane Smith - Advocate for healthy gluten-free diets

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How healthy is your gluten-free diet? If you're not sure how to answer this question, you'll have a much better idea after reading our guest interview with [Melissa Diane Smith](#), nutritionist and author of [Gluten Free Throughout the Year - A Month-by-Month Guide for Healthy Eating](#), [Going Against the Grain](#) and co-author of the national bestseller, [Syndrome X](#).

Have you noticed how many gluten-free products contain nothing but refined carbohydrates (flours, starches and sugars) and refined fats? Melissa is concerned that eating these types of gluten-free foods in excess put us at higher risk for developing conditions such as obesity, diabetes, [Syndrome X](#), autoimmune disorders, Celiac disease, gluten sensitivity, grain allergies, and digestive problems.

And with good reason - a refined gluten-free diet is as unhealthy as a refined wheat and sugar-based diet. As [Dr. Stephen Wengen](#) writes in Melissa's new book, "Being gluten free is only one aspect of optimizing your health."



Melissa Diane Smith author of *Gluten Free Throughout the Year*

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### Guest Interview with Melissa Diane Smith

Melissa, as a nutritionist and author of 3 previous books that deal with diabetes, Syndrome X (metabolic syndrome) and health disorders related to carbohydrate metabolism, you look at the gluten-free diet differently than most. What is your biggest concern about the health risks associated with today's gluten-free diet?

**My biggest concern is that many people are eating a gluten-free version of the Standard American Diet (appropriately abbreviated SAD), and therefore setting themselves up for excess weight, diabetes, heart disease and other chronic health problems without realizing it.**

**We all begin eating gluten free to improve our health, and strictly avoiding gluten keeps the immune system from reacting to the problematic gluten protein. But if we replace high-carbohydrate, high-glycemic (or blood-sugar-spiking) refined wheat flour products such as bread, baked goods, and cereal with high-carbohydrate, high-glycemic gluten-free rice and corn products and sweets (as most people who go gluten free do), the body has to process all those blood-sugar-spiking carbohydrates. It responds to blood-sugar-spiking foods by producing insulin, a fat-storage hormone. And regularly eating blood-sugar-spiking foods sets off many insulin-related changes that over time lead to weight gain, insulin resistance (the condition at the core of type 2 diabetes), unhealthy blood fat levels, high blood pressure, and more.**

People newly diagnosed with Celiac disease, non-Celiac gluten sensitivity or dermatitis herpetiformis may or may not receive appropriate dietary counseling when their doctor sends them home with instructions to "eliminate gluten" from their diets forever. Can you briefly summarize the key points you stress when counseling someone new to the gluten-free diet?

**Well, of course, the first thing I explain is where gluten is found – all foods, drinks, condiments, and additives made from wheat, spelt, kamut, rye, and barley – so the newly diagnosed can strictly eliminate gluten from their diet. But I also explain that food quality is important when selecting gluten-free foods. Far too many people are focused on "gluten-free" and nothing else and end up eating junky refined gluten-free foods that don't promote health. I counsel them to understand the importance of eating whole foods that are naturally gluten free, such as meats, fish, vegetables, fruits and nuts. Not only are naturally gluten-free foods rich in nutrients that support health but eating them offers almost guaranteed protection from accidental exposure to gluten that could make them sick.**

**I also emphasize avoiding refined ingredients. That means staying away from white rice and products made from white rice flour (which is usually just labeled rice flour), but also avoiding other refined carbohydrates, such sugar or evaporated cane juice and high-fructose corn syrup, and refined fats, such as corn and soybean oils and partially hydrogenated oil. Research shows that these refined ingredients are disease-causers in our society. That means all of us should steer clear of foods made with them so we don't end up trading one disease (a gluten-induced one) for another disease (a disease brought on by eating refined carbohydrates or refined fats).**

If there was a "Gluten-Free Food Pyramid" to help people make healthy gluten-free food choices what food group would you put at the base of the pyramid?

**The base of the pyramid should be non-starchy vegetables – those that aren't root vegetables or winter squash. Examples include salad greens, spinach, broccoli, asparagus, celery, and zucchini. What is wonderful about non-starchy vegetables is they are packed with vitamins and minerals and low in calories and carbohydrates. So, they're the best deal in nutrition that we have. We can eat them to our heart's content and not gain weight. They help keep our bodies lean and able to function at their best to stave off disease and stay**

**healthy.**

Most people on gluten-free diets crave breads and we're seeing some pretty great tasting breads and mixes enter the gluten-free market. Have you found any healthy bread recipes or commercial gluten-free bread products that you feel are healthy choices (high fiber and protein, low in refined gluten-free flours and starches?)

**To be honest, my tastes have changed so much in the close to 20 years that I have gone against the grain that I am not a big fan of bread, especially the light, spongy, bland bread that so many people who eat bread made out of refined flour are used to. I prefer denser, heartier, more flavorful breads. I like a hearty, very nutritious tortilla substitute that I mention in my new book. The tortilla substitute is made of omega-3-rich sprouted brown and golden flaxseeds and is low in carbs, high in fiber, and completely grain-free.**

One of the greatest health benefits of reducing refined grains and starches in gluten-free diets is better blood sugar control and maintaining a healthy weight. Which gluten-free grains, if any, do you recommend to avoid blood sugar highs and lows, insulin resistance and diabetes?

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