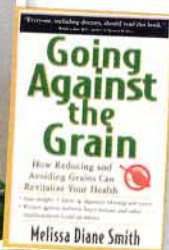




THE STONE-AGE DIET

That slice of wholegrain bread may be giving you health problems



Here's something you may find hard to get your head around – imagine not eating anything made from grains. Not only does that mean nothing made from refined grains like white flour and sugar but also no whole grains. So no grainy bread, cereals or rice.

As impossible as this sounds, for some of us it may be worth it for the sake of our health, according to American nutritionist Melissa Diane Smith. The author of a book called *Going Against the Grain*, Melissa says our bodies weren't designed to cope with grains, and a diet high in

refined grains can play a part in diabetes, heart disease and obesity.

She says not only are refined grains responsible for some health problems but whole grains, which we're usually encouraged to eat because they are considered healthy, may also make us unwell and overweight.

"If you want to reduce your risk of getting a disease like diabetes or maintain a healthy weight, one of the best things you can do is greatly reduce the amount of grains you eat or even remove them from your diet," says Melissa.

AREN'T WHOLE GRAINS BETTER FOR US?

"They are better than refined ones because they contain fibre but they still have nutritional shortcomings," says Melissa, who is currently visiting New Zealand.

"But whether they're whole grains or refined, grains are still carbohydrate-dense foods. They still affect our blood sugar

and may lead to insulin-related health problems and weight gain if we don't control portion sizes.

WHAT DO GRAINS DO TO US?

Refined grain foods (ie white flour and sugar) aren't healthy because the refining process strips them of nutrients as well as the fibre which is needed to keep our blood sugar levels on an even keel.

They make our blood sugar levels soar, forcing our bodies to pump out insulin to deal with all the excess blood sugar.

High insulin levels make us more likely to store fat, increase the chance of getting some types of cancer and lead to a condition called Syndrome X, which is known to increase our risk of heart disease, diabetes and other degenerative diseases.

Whole grains don't have such a dramatic effect, but still do impact on blood sugar, as do fruit and starchy vegetables like potatoes.

? DID YOU KNOW...

Whole grains also:

- * Contain substances called anti-nutrients that impair your body's ability to absorb minerals such as calcium, iron and zinc.
- * Contain substances called lectins (food proteins) that interfere with the way your intestines and your immune system work.

I'VE BEEN EATING GRAINS FOR YEARS AND I'M OKAY

Some people are more sensitive to grains than others (for example, those with coeliac disease). For the rest of us, if grains do take a toll on our health we're unlikely to see an immediate effect – diseases can take years or even decades to develop.

We may have signs like excess weight around our middle but think that's just what happens as we get older. Meanwhile, the insulin in our bodies – which has had to work so hard for so long – may be unable to cope any longer and we can end up with diabetes or heart disease.

DOESN'T MY BODY NEED CARBOHYDRATES?

Yes. But you can get the carbohydrates your body needs from non-starchy veges, says Melissa. You have to eat plenty of vegetables but the bonus is you're also getting lots of other nutrients at the same time, which you don't get when you eat grains.

The best way to make sure you're getting plenty of vegetables is to switch every grain-based food you would normally have with vegetables. For example, instead of having a chicken sandwich at lunch time, swap the bread for lettuce, tomatoes, cucumber and peppers and have a chicken salad. Instead of having pasta with dinner add another kind of vegetable to the ones you're already serving.

WHAT IS THE BEST DIET?

In an ideal world we should be eating a Stone Age diet – that means one with lots of vegetables, along with fruit, lean animal protein (meat and eggs) plus nuts and seeds. That's what Melissa, a former health writer, has been doing for the past 17 years and she says it's made a world of difference. Twenty years ago she developed chronic fatigue syndrome and over the next few years tried different treatments with no luck. She changed to a diet high in whole grains but the more she ate, the worse she got, suffering

Have extra vegetables instead of grain-based foods like bread



digestive problems, bloating, sore throats and depression. Her weight also ballooned.

Then her research led to her cutting all grains out of her diet and only eating lean animal protein, vegetables and nuts. The weight dropped off and she started feeling much better. Eventually, keen to eat "normal" foods again, she reintroduced grains but her old symptoms returned. So Melissa went back to being grain-free and has enjoyed good health and stayed a healthy weight ever since. She became a nutritionist and has seen many clients enjoy similar results after reducing or cutting out grains.

THE GREAT GRAIN CHALLENGE

The thought of completely going without grains is too much for most of us. But Melissa suggests people serious about improving their health and losing weight should at least try this: Replace all the foods in your diet that contain white flour and sugar with vegetables for two weeks. "It's not going against the grain completely, but you should notice a difference."

Results people may notice after going grain-free include feeling calmer, being better able to concentrate and suffering less bloating. Many also lose weight.

If you're really serious, try cutting out the following for a fortnight:

- Wheat
- Spelt
- Rye and barley
- Oats
- Rice
- Millet
- Corn
- Sugar

Vegetables you should be aiming to eat plenty of include:

- Asparagus
- Broccoli

- Cauliflower
 - Celery
 - Cucumber
 - Green, red and Chinese cabbage
 - Lettuce and bok choy
 - Mushrooms
 - Spinach
 - Peppers
 - Green beans
 - Courgettes
- Fruit and starchy vegetables like potatoes are higher in carbohydrates so should be eaten in moderation.



DOES IT WORK?

I took Melissa up on her challenge. The first week I cut out bread, pasta, rice, cereals and anything with sugar, as well as potatoes. I ate lots of eggs, fish and lean meat, drank only filtered water and downed at least seven or eight servings of vegetables and fruit per day.

The first few days were really hard, but I persevered. After about four days I no longer craved bread and wasn't hungry. In the second week I cheated. I had sushi for lunch twice, roast potatoes and a hot chocolate. My fruit and vege consumption went down to four or five servings a day.

Did I notice any difference? I was more clear-headed and able to concentrate better. It didn't affect my mood but I did lose weight – 1.6kg in the first week and 700g in the second. I was also less bloated.

My verdict? I don't know if I can cut grains out of my life completely but it's definitely worth cutting down on them, especially refined ones. I also like the habit of eating lots of vegetables. For more info, visit www.goingagainstthegrain.com