

Introduction

Why We're Writing This Book

If you're picking up this book in the hope of finding an answer to your health problems, you have the right frame of mind. This book is about gluten sensitivity and its underappreciated ability to have far-reaching, negative effects upon your health. The decision to write a book about gluten came as a result of our many years of practicing a method of medicine identifying the root cause of people's health problems. We call this method the HealthNOW Method. Again and again we had patients describing how significantly their lives changed after discovering that they were gluten sensitive. This book aims to inspire you to seek out the root cause of your health problem and help you discover if the root cause is gluten sensitivity.

Why Do So Many Patients Suffer Undiagnosed?

It has now been more than fifteen years since we became interested in the effects of gluten on the health of our patients. In years past, the most commonly known form of gluten sensitivity, celiac disease, was a rare diagnosis. What is even more startling is that celiac disease is diagnosed in only a small fraction of affected individuals, even today. Why is this? The biggest reason lies in how standard medicine approaches health in general. Patients

with gluten sensitivity, we have found, demonstrate many different symptoms. Likewise, the symptoms are usually nonspecific, which means that they could manifest from many different health conditions. As a result, more common conditions are investigated first and sometimes the underappreciated disorders, such as gluten sensitivity, go unnoticed.

Dr Vikki's Mother Started Our Gluten Adventure

Vikki's mother's case was an example of this. In addition to having many medical problems, including an adrenal gland dysfunction, she had long suffered from chronic headaches, fatigue, low blood sugar, constipation and a host of other complaints. She had undergone many tests and examinations, but none of these had given her an answer. Medicines were prescribed and treatments recommended, but in the end, the symptoms stayed the same.

We had just begun investigating gluten sensitivity in our office when we tested Vikki's mother for anti-gliadin antibodies. This is a test to see if the body's immune system is reacting to gluten in a negative way. Well, to our surprise, she had elevated levels of these antibodies. Even more intriguing was the fact that she responded dramatically well to a gluten-free diet. Her headaches, low blood sugar and constipation resolved after having suffered for well over fifty years of her life. Today she is a vibrant, healthy eighty-five-year-old who takes no medication and, by her own statement, considers that she is in "the best health of her entire life."

Our Youngest Daughter Proves the Genetic Link

To drive home the point even further, fifteen years ago our newly born daughter had been having persistent problems with projectile vomiting. When this is an ongoing problem, believe us when we say that you try to find an answer as quickly as possible. Not only is it painful to see your child suffer, but the mess is not much fun either.

After Vikki's mother was found to react poorly to gluten, and knowing that this can run in families, we tested our daughter. Sure enough, she likewise demonstrated gluten sensitivity and responded

very nicely to the elimination of gluten in her diet. This started our crusade to evaluate the effects of gluten on people's health.

Why Is Gluten a Problem?

But what is gluten? You have possibly heard of it in recent years, with gluten-free foods being sold at health stores and the rash of gluten-free recipe books in bookstores. But what is it? And what is gluten sensitivity? Gluten is essentially the major protein component of wheat, rye and barley. As it is metabolized or broken down, it can give some people tremendous problems. In short, the body's immune system can see it as a toxin and therefore launch an attack against it. Varied and multiple symptoms are created depending on what tissues of the body are attacked.

Take the Gluten Sensitivity Self-Test

Check off the symptoms that apply to you:

Digestive

- Bloating and/or gas*
- Constipation and/or diarrhea*
- Nausea*
- Weight trouble*
- Iron-deficiency anemia*

Hormonal

- Fatigue*
- Sleep problems*
- Depression, anxiety and/or mood swings*
- Menstrual problems*
- Infertility*
- Thyroid problems*
- Osteoporosis or osteopenia*

Neurological

- Headaches and/or Migraines*
- Memory problems*
- Joint pains or aches*
- Fibromyalgia*
- Brain Fog*

Immune System

- Get infections easily*
- Arthritis, any type, you or family*
- Cancer history, you or family*
- Autoimmune disease, you or family*
- Celiac disease, you or family*

If you checked 1 to 3 boxes gluten sensitivity may be playing a role in your health problems.

If you checked 4 to 7 boxes there is a definite possibility that you are suffering from gluten sensitivity.

If you checked 8 or more boxes the likelihood is strong that gluten sensitivity is having a negative effect upon your health.

Let's Improve Your Health

Are you ready to consider a fresh approach to your health? Are you interested in finding what the underlying cause is rather than merely masking your symptoms? So are we. If you suffer from cramping, nausea, chronic bowel problems or stomach pains, the information in this book about gluten could be what you have been seeking. If you have chronic fatigue, sleep difficulties, depression, memory difficulty or anxiety, you will want to hear about how gluten affects the nervous system. If you have joint pains, rashes, chronic pain, weight issues or menstrual problems, don't rule gluten out as a potential base cause to your symptoms. If you are constantly getting infections or have other immune or autoimmune disorders, investigating gluten certainly is worth your time. While all of these complaints are varied in nature, their occurrences reflect how gluten may "stress" your health.

It wasn't until the 1970s that clinicians even appreciated how "bad" cholesterol and fats in our diet cause heart disease and stroke. Since that time, attention to these dietary components has significantly decreased these diseases. Likewise, we are just now understanding the effects that simple sugars have on our bodies' ability to produce insulin and regulate glucose in relationship to diabetes and glucose intolerance.

What You Eat Does Matter

Diet has always been a major influence on our health, and truly, we are what we eat. New vitamins, minerals and herbal nutrients continue to be discovered decade after decade. This is such a virgin field in this modern era of medicine, even though it would seem to be so basic. It is no wonder, then, that we are only now embracing how gluten can affect our bodies. This protein in wheat, rye and barley has been around for thousands of years. But its evolution, and its growing appearance in our diets, has finally caught our attention. For many of you, it indeed may be the root cause to your symptoms.

We have written this book because of experiences with our patients.

We love helping people get healthier so that they can live life to the fullest. Illness and symptoms keep a person from fully experiencing life and fully participating in life's pleasures. Our source of continued inspiration is our patients. Below is a letter that a patient wrote to us when asked how her life had changed after discovering that she was gluten sensitive.

Rachel's Incredible Story

It's very strange to think back and remember the years that I suffered because I didn't know I had gluten sensitivity. There is a very clear line of separation between my old life with gluten and my new life without it. It almost feels like I'd been living another life for so many years, like I was a different person. My story is relatively heavy on my symptoms, because I'd had my old life for almost twenty-seven years, and my new life is only six months old. I'm confident I'll be adding many more years to my new life...and many chapters to my story.

I'd had allergy-like symptoms year-round since I was six or seven, and I'd had the skin test for allergies when I was fourteen. I didn't react to any of the allergens, so my diagnosis was non-allergy rhinitis. My allergy-like symptoms persisted for another ten years, but since they had no distinct cause, I had no real treatment options and never experienced relief.

I started to have problems with acne before I was ten. I tried Proactiv and many other acne products, but none of them kept my acne under control. I even tried removing chocolate from my diet, since everyone seemed to blame chocolate for their blemishes, but that had no effect. Even in my mid-twenties, I still had the complexion I'd had as a teenager: oily and blemished. I eventually was convinced that I would never have clear skin.

My hair was always thin when I was young, but by the time I was twelve, it was quite obvious that my hair was thinning. My

hair continued to thin all the way through college and beyond. I could see my entire scalp through my hair when I looked in the mirror. I felt there was no point in styling it anymore, because even the hairdressers I went to didn't know what they could do with my hair, besides fluffing it up with mousse and hairspray. My hair was simply falling out and not growing back.

By sixteen, I had started feeling overly fatigued. I no longer had the energy to stay up late. Every day, I would come home from school and take a nap until dinnertime. My memory started to suffer, and I was experiencing the notorious "brain fog" effect. I had always been at the top of my class and somewhat of an overachiever scholastically, but slowly, I was losing the ability to grasp new concepts, and homework assignments that normally would have taken a short time would drag on for hours. I would often lose control of my eye movements while reading, which only added to my frustration and multiplied the time and effort I would spend on my studies.

I seemed to catch every cold and flu that made its way to my school. I could count on having bronchitis twice a year, usually coupled with tonsillitis or a sinus infection. I would have random skin infections that resulted in hospital visits once or twice a year. It just seemed like my immune system couldn't keep up.

I often wondered how the other students in my classes could finish all of their homework AND play sports AND participate in after-school activities and clubs... It just didn't seem possible to me. I would complain about spending three hours on my calculus homework the night before, and my classmates would stare at me like I was crazy and say they only spent an hour on the same assignment. Still, I managed to keep my grades up, but at a tremendous cost mentally and physically.

I slowly realized over the years that I would have to give up my dream job. I had wanted to be a geneticist, but I knew I wouldn't survive such demanding college coursework if I could

barely keep afloat in high school. I settled for a subject that would be less demanding on my mind and body, but that I still had interest in.

By then, the pain had started to set in. The pain started in my back and eventually moved through my torso and into my limbs. It was a deep, aching pain, unlike a sore muscle or a vertebra out of place, and always seemed to radiate from my back. My pain levels would fluctuate on a daily basis, but I normally found hugs to be especially painful, and feeling the pressure of my back against any piece of furniture would worsen the pain considerably. Ibuprofen would usually dull the pain, but pain was my constant reminder that something was awry.

I didn't really have the energy to drive, but when I finally got a car and started providing my own transportation, one very serious problem presented itself. Every time I would have to drive for longer than ten minutes at a time, there was a one-hundred-percent chance that I would fall asleep at the wheel. It was never the result of a gradual sleepiness; it was always abrupt, like my brain switched itself off. I would usually wake up a few moments later, also abruptly, and I would spend the rest of my drive battling sleep. If my drive to work took twenty-five minutes, it wasn't unusual for me to fall asleep fifteen or more times. I sometimes resorted to punching myself in the leg to try to keep myself awake, but I would often fall asleep anyway and awaken to find myself still punching my leg. In all those years, I actually never had any wrecks as a result of my sleepiness, and I only ran off the road once... I knew I was VERY lucky, but I also knew that someday my luck would eventually run out.

I fell into deep depression after college. I knew my body wouldn't hold up long enough for me to go somewhere, socialize and go home, so I didn't really have a social life or a network of friends for a few years. I felt old and worn out and very much in pain. Many times in my life, I just wanted a hug of encouragement,

but I knew that a hug would only cause me more physical pain; constantly having to weigh emotional comfort against physical pain ultimately made me feel even worse about myself. I felt so alienated from my old friends, and several of my relationships ended because I wanted to spend most of my time resting at home instead of going out and having fun. My life was going nowhere.

My daytime sleepiness worsened to the point that I would fall asleep while sitting at my desk at work. I would sometimes crawl under my desk to sleep, because I was too exhausted to walk to my car and take a nap there. It was almost as if I could feel a command to sleep, like something in my brain would switch off and I had no choice but to obey. I no longer felt rested at all, no matter how many hours I allowed for sleep. I hated sleeping, I hated being awake, and I hated the grey area in between.

My digestion was suffering also. I felt bloated all the time and was usually constipated. I tried a diet very high in fiber, which is, of course, what is recommended, but my digestion never improved. It didn't seem to matter what I ate; I just couldn't process the food and move it out of my system.

I was in my early twenties and at the time, dressed like a skater girl. Some of my doctors constantly asked me if I used recreational drugs, because they couldn't come up with any other medical reason why I should be having so many seemingly unrelated symptoms, and I guess my looks were deceiving. Of course, I didn't use drugs, and I know the doctors were just trying to rule out all the possibilities, but I encountered the same questions from the same doctors, visit after visit. It was like they didn't believe me, or didn't want to believe me. I think one of my doctors eventually wrote me off as a hypochondriac, but I don't have his notes, so I'm not certain. I was very reluctant to seek help for my problems for a while afterward.

But I needed help so I continued to try to find it. However, the doctors throughout the years didn't know how to treat me. My

symptoms were all over the map. There was a routine I came to expect. I would visit a new doctor and explain some of my worst symptoms, and they would respond with a smile and say, “Ah... I bet I know what’s going on...” The usual suspects were fibromyalgia and multiple sclerosis. The doctors would have blood drawn and run all kinds of tests, sometimes series of MRIs and MRAs, but in the end, no doctor felt comfortable declaring any diagnosis. For years, all I wanted was a diagnosis...any diagnosis...so I could receive some kind of treatment. Instead, I usually received the generic “diet and exercise” response.

I decided to give the “diet and exercise” plan another try. I didn’t have the energy to go to a gym, so I bought a dance mat for my PlayStation and played Dance Dance Revolution for my aerobic exercise. At least three times a week, I danced until the game said I had burned 200 calories—usually about twenty minutes. I would then collapse from complete exhaustion. I tried warming up and cooling down, drinking more water, eating a healthy snack beforehand to give me energy, and reducing my goal to 100 calories, but the result was always the same. I hated exercise, and I didn’t understand how anyone could think exercise would improve their energy levels. I could only force myself to exercise at night, after I didn’t have anything else I needed to accomplish that day.

I was eventually referred to a sleep specialist, who suspected I had narcolepsy or some other sleep disorder and had me do an overnight sleep study at her clinic. She studied my results and could not offer a solid explanation for my sleepiness. I had some, but not all, of the symptoms of classic narcolepsy, but she prescribed Provigil anyway to see if it would help, and I saw incredible improvement. I still didn’t have the energy to do too much more physical activity, but my daytime sleepiness waned. I was, however, very dependent on Provigil, and I would start falling asleep again if I missed a dose.

I was very near the point of giving up when a friend referred me to the doctors at HealthNOW Medical Center. I truly felt the doctors there actually listened to my problems and wanted to help me, so when I was ordered to go on a modified elimination diet, I hated the idea, but I decided to make the effort and try the diet. No other doctor had given me such a radical piece of advice, and it sounded crazy enough to work.

After just a few days on the diet, I experienced heavy withdrawal symptoms. My body was craving *something*...craving it badly...but I didn't know what or why. I was especially moody, impatient and unpleasant, and none of the food I ate would comfort me. Not long afterward, the doctors at HealthNOW told me that my saliva test confirmed that I did indeed have gluten sensitivity. So...I was having gluten withdrawal. The concept blew my mind. I hated to admit it, but I knew they were right. They had started me on the right path, and I had a diagnosis I could work with.

My body's first noticeable, positive reaction to my gluten-free diet was completely unexpected. I woke up one morning and realized that my bed sheets felt "different." My clothes also felt "different." It was almost as if everything I touched had a more pronounced texture. I put on my sandals to go to work and noticed that the straps were no longer tight enough to keep my feet from slipping out. Apparently, my body's reaction to gluten had caused quite a bit of swelling, especially in my feet, that I had never noticed.

The pain, my old constant companion, began to subside. I could finally sit in my expensive, ergonomic desk chair at work for longer periods of time without worrying about my back hurting just from the pressure.

After a few weeks on a gluten-free diet, my acne cleared up considerably, and after a few more weeks, blemishes became more and more of a rarity. My hair slowly started to thicken until

I could no longer see so much of my scalp through my hair. My coworkers noticed my clearer skin and thicker hair before I did.

During the last cold and flu season, I only caught one cold from a coworker. That's a record low for me. Most of my allergy-like symptoms have subsided, so I no longer feel I have to carry a box of tissues everywhere. My immune system seems much more efficient and much less stressed.

My digestive system has also started to work more efficiently, and I rarely encounter the digestive issues I'd dealt with in the past. I quickly lost about eight pounds during the first few weeks of the diet, and my weight is still much more manageable.

I have even survived a few days without Provigil. When I miss a dose, I still feel sleepy, but I don't battle to stay awake anymore. I am hopeful that I will progress to the point that I no longer have to rely on that medication at all.

I feel so much less pain.... It's incredible (but still slightly strange) to be able to enjoy hugs again. The radiating pain is mostly gone now. I usually only feel pain when I've earned it with an injury.

It's still very difficult sometimes, knowing that I won't be able to go out to eat with friends at most restaurants without bringing my own food. I still have so many food options, so I try to focus on what I *can* eat instead of what I *can't* eat. I'm slowly becoming a better cook, and I am more comfortable eating my own culinary creations because I know exactly which ingredients went into the food.

I know I am the same person I was before I kicked gluten to the curb, but the difference in my quality of life is staggering. I'm just so much healthier, and life is so much more vibrant than it was before. I still occasionally deal with brain fog and fatigue, but certainly not to the extent that my symptoms impact my life so greatly anymore.

Hope is a wonderful thing.

—Rachel F.

We Want You to Have a “Health Miracle”!

Such “miracles” are almost daily occurrences in our practice. Is that rewarding? Absolutely! Do we only want such benefits for the patients that are within driving distance of our clinic? Absolutely not. If reading this book doesn’t improve your health, it is very likely that it will improve the health of someone you know. Gluten intolerance is that pervasive and, at the same time, that unrecognized. We are committed, through our endeavors, to increase people’s awareness of it.

SECTION ONE

Why All the Sudden Interest in Gluten?

Introduction to Gluten Sensitivity

Angelita's Story

Angelita could not believe it. For the first time in almost fifteen years, she felt “normal.” No cramping, no bloating, no fatigue. These and so many other symptoms that she had suffered from over the years had gradually dissipated, almost miraculously, in just a few weeks.

What had made the difference? Angelita had been diagnosed as having gluten sensitivity, a dietary intolerance to a protein called gluten. Since she had eliminated gluten from her diet, all of her complaints had resolved. The days of missing work due to the unpredictable nature of her bowels were over. She was no longer at the mercy of her body. Angelita was now in control. The frustration and irritation of her chronic symptoms were now replaced with a sense of relief.

But at the same time, Angelita could not help but feel a bit resentful of the delay in finding the root cause of her problems.

In the prime of her life, she had been forced to adapt to the constraints of her bodily handicap. In what was supposed to be the age of modern medicine, why had this diagnosis escaped the slew of physicians she had been seeing since she was a child?

Doctors “Miss” Gluten Sensitivity When Diagnosing Patients

Such case studies are all too typical. What complicates the picture even further is that most clinicians have yet to distinguish gluten sensitivity from celiac disease. As an overview, celiac disease is a type of gluten intolerance that specifically damages the digestive tract. Celiac disease represents the most well-known gluten-related disorder, but it is by no means the most common one. Thousands of people suffer from non-celiac gluten sensitivity, as will be explained in this book, and it is our goal to increase awareness of the entire spectrum of gluten health disorders. Celiac disease simply represents one variety of gluten intolerance, as you will learn.

It Takes, on Average, Eleven Years to Get Diagnosed

On average, there has been a delay of eleven years between the time of symptom onset and a diagnosis of celiac disease for those who have actually been diagnosed. Since celiac disease is the most commonly recognized gluten-related disorder, the delay in diagnosing gluten sensitivity is presumably much longer. Opinions support the idea that the less than twenty-five percent of our population who is suffering with gluten intolerance has been accurately diagnosed.¹ Today, there are many diagnostic tests that aid the diagnosis, and it appears that one in every 250 people of American and European descent has celiac disease,² but this represents a small fraction of all gluten-sensitive individuals. And

while celiac disease is the major known form of gluten sensitivity, how many other people have the lesser-known gluten intolerance, which results in many serious and variable symptoms?

Although described by Aretaeus of Cappadocia in 250 AD, celiac disease was originally described scientifically in 1888 by an astute clinician named Gee.³ A century later the majority of the cases are still unidentified.

Doctors Don't Look for the Root Cause

In today's era, no different from centuries past, there exists a large number of people who suffer from a multitude of symptoms for which traditional medicine has yet to identify the cause. This has occurred despite tremendous advances in genetic research, diagnostic abilities and knowledge of the body's physiologic and pathologic processes. These symptoms range from fatigue, depression and stress to chronic pain, joint aches and many, many more. So, like Angelita, who endured test after test that continued to show normal results, modern medicine seeks to comfort the symptoms and wait for the cause to declare itself, or for better diagnostics to evolve.

Masking the Symptom Is Not the Answer

How many people now take a pain reliever or a sleep aid on a daily basis? Certainly these medications can have beneficial, though temporary, effects for many people. But it is not reaching the root cause of their problem. If a symptom exists should we just mask it with a drug or should our goal be to detect the underlying, root cause that created that symptom? We feel that it is self-evident that the answer is the latter, and we call our approach and philosophy the HealthNOW Method.

For years, Angelita had tolerated her stomach bloating, painful, intermittent cramping and loose movements. She had been told to try fiber, then a series of medications, to relieve the cramping and diarrhea. While sometimes things appeared to be improving, the symptoms

would always return sooner or later. She had seen multiple specialists and undergone many blood tests and probing diagnostics, none of which gave a clue as to the cause of her condition. She had essentially resolved to accept that she indeed had irritable bowel syndrome, and that relief was unattainable.

Angelita Found Her Solution—So Can You!

Eventually, Angelita came to our clinic and began the HealthNOW Method. She was found to have a dramatic response to eliminating gluten in her diet, and her blood testing did show borderline abnormalities, suggesting gluten sensitivity. All of her stomach and intestinal complaints resolved. Like so many others, what was thought to be irritable bowel syndrome turned out to be gluten sensitivity. The solution was simply a change in diet and not an array of medications or other treatments.

Labeling a Disease Is Not the Same as Curing It

Irritable bowel syndrome is a diagnostic label that many gluten-sensitive patients carry prior to their eventual diagnosis. It is a disorder assigned to patients who complain of abdominal cramping and alternating bouts of constipation and diarrhea (and negative diagnostic exams). In theory, this disorder represents a defective ability of the intestines to move digested material along the digestive tract. If it is too fast, cramping and diarrhea occur. If too slow, constipation develops.

A cause of this disorder is not well-defined, and it's likely that many people carry this label even though their root cause may be gluten sensitivity. Several diagnostic labels such as this exist in medicine. They provide patients with a name for their group of symptoms and can help organize research, but at the same time may deter individuals from continuing to look for the real cause.

What Do You Do When Lab Tests Are Normal, But You Still Feel Sick?

With conditions like migraines, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia and insomnia, it is evident that diagnostic medicine has significant limitations. All of these represent similar labels to irritable bowel syndrome. Tests and exams are repeatedly normal, and patients are left without any clear understanding of their conditions' causes. Theories about a genetic flaw or a relationship to stress are often given as explanations, and a medication is prescribed to hopefully alleviate the symptoms. The patient then leaves feeling hopeless and perplexed.

Such is the case for those with gluten sensitivity. Their symptoms continue despite medication Band-aids that seek to appease their woes temporarily. Fortunately, there is a growing interest not only in preventative health and lifestyle, but also in diet, nutrition and the environment. This is helping to accelerate our understanding of health in a much broader sense and expand our scope for other potential causes of poor health.

Is the “Art” of Diagnosis No Longer Practiced?

Interestingly, traditional medicine used to handle patient care differently. Prior to all the high-tech radiology procedures, the advanced blood tests and the vast arsenal of prescription drugs, patients' symptoms and physical exam findings were the bases for treatment. Likewise, therapies that were anecdotally effective were introduced long before research evidence validated their benefit. With the advance of diagnostic testing and medication treatment, medicine has adopted stricter rules before implementing therapies. This has not necessarily been a bad thing, especially when it can prevent an unknown side effect of a new drug. But what has developed concurrently has been a shift in the approach to the patient. Clinicians have begun to rely more heavily on test results and less so on symptoms, behavior and lifestyle.

In other words, the creative art of medicine has lost some of its creativity.

A Fresh Approach to Patient Care

In trying to approach health from a fresh perspective, it is important to evaluate all the potential causes of a patient's symptoms. This not only includes family history, medications and known allergies but also diet, nutrition and lifestyle. Symptoms are the body's way of indicating that something is wrong with its normal ability to function. They may be minor, or they could be major and noteworthy. Regardless, they are warning signals that something is affecting the body's health and normal functioning.

Symptoms Can Take Years to Develop

What is not always intuitive is that the cause of these symptoms may have been days, months or even years in the making. For instance, plaque from high cholesterol doesn't develop during the few years before a heart attack; instead, as studies support, arteries develop plaque formation decades earlier. The effects of poor diet, poor exercise and genetics actually begin insidiously before the actual disease (the heart attack) is realized.

Likewise, for someone with multiple sclerosis, a disorder affecting the brain and spinal cord, symptoms of numbness and dizziness can appear years before the diagnosis is made by standard medical testing. Therefore, time association can be quite poor when trying to manage health problems.

The Body Often Responds Quickly to the Correct Therapy

Once Angelita eliminated gluten from her diet, it took about a few weeks to feel significantly better, and within a few months, all of her abdominal complaints resolved. This delay between the cause and the effect

was what made it impossible for her to figure out that her condition was a dietary problem. Once gluten is removed, the inflammation that is already present in the small intestines must heal, and this takes some time.

Some Patients Revert to Bad Habits

Many patients make the mistake, months or years later, of adding gluten back into their diets. Usually, within days, weeks or months, symptoms recur. If it takes a long period of time, sometimes patients don't realize that it was the reintroduction of gluten that created their problems. All too often patients mistakenly believe that negative dietary changes will result in a rapid onset of symptoms. When this isn't experienced, they assume that the food is not a problem.

Many disorders of our health are not realized for long periods of time after the inciting causes are introduced. Unless a clinician can continue to probe into all the areas of a patient's health and continue to focus on what systems of the body are creating the symptoms, it can be a challenge to find the true underlying, root cause. Foods and toxins in the environment likely pose the biggest challenges since their effects are difficult to measure within the body, and symptoms can develop very insidiously over time.

Gluten Affects Many Systems of the Body

There is also evidence that gluten intolerance can cause many symptoms outside of the digestive system.⁴ Inability to break down this protein fully in the intestines can result in effects in other areas of the body including the nervous system, the immune system and the hormonal regulatory systems. For most of those affected, there are no digestive-related symptoms at all. This fact has certainly contributed to gluten sensitivity as an overlooked diagnosis, as most consider that food reactions will create digestive symptoms.

Gluten intolerance has been implicated in symptoms such as headaches, joint pains, infertility, menstrual irregularities, depression, fatigue, sleep difficulties and many others. All of these will be discussed

in detail in later chapters, but suffice it to say that intolerance to gluten in our diets is much more common than appreciated.

Gluten Acts Like a Toxin in Your Body

For a patient with gluten sensitivity, gluten is unable to be broken down well in the upper intestine and absorbed. Instead, it combines with digestive enzymes and triggers the body's own immune system to actively inflame the intestinal wall. The immune system sees the gluten-enzyme complex as foreign and launches an inflammatory assault to rid this foreigner from the body. Unfortunately, the battlefield is your small intestine, and it becomes inflamed and damaged in the process. This results in intestinal symptoms in many, but also affects the intestine's ability to absorb other nutrients. As a result, poor nutrition, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and exhaustion of the body's immune system can occur, creating many other problems. This is a common mechanism by which gluten intolerance can be the root of so many different complaints.

Gluten Enters the Bloodstream and Creates Havoc in Other Organs

In addition, if gluten (a protein) is digested or even partially digested and reaches the bloodstream, there is ample evidence that this protein complex can have detrimental effects on other organ systems. This also occurs through immune system processes.⁵ For instance, children with autism routinely have improvement in behavioral abilities when gluten is eliminated from their diets. Antibodies (substances your immune system makes to identify and neutralize foreign objects) directed against gluten have also been implicated in seizures through effects on the brain in patients.⁶

Gluten Affects the Brain

While, again, diagnostic testing lags behind any objective evidence of cause and effect, gluten, through immune reactions, negatively interacts

with certain brain receptors, causing these symptoms. This indicates that gluten can affect one's health in other ways besides its direct effects on the intestinal wall and digestive system. Case reports support evidence that there is much more to gluten's health effects than is currently accepted in traditional medicine.

Wendell's Depression and Fatigue

Wendell is an interesting example of this type of situation. Wendell had complained of fatigue and sleepiness for years. Sleep disorders had been considered, but a cause for his lack of sleep, as well as treatments directed toward insomnia, had provided no relief. He tried to exercise to see if this would help, but, honestly, his lack of energy was a huge deterrent.

Diagnoses of chronic fatigue syndrome and depression had been suggested by different clinicians over the years. After trying several medications to treat his symptoms, all of which had minimal benefit, he decided to come to our clinic. At the time he was taking several medications for sleep and depression, but was very dissatisfied.

Through our HealthNOW Method, he demonstrated positive blood tests for gluten sensitivity and had an improvement, in only one and a half weeks, to a gluten-free diet. Wendell's energy and level of alertness improved significantly, and he has progressively been able to stop taking *all* the medications previously prescribed.

Though the many prior medical tests and examinations had failed to show a root cause, eventually, Wendell was able to identify gluten as the culprit. What is most interesting in Wendell's case is that he had suffered no digestive symptoms. If a clinician only associates gluten with celiac disease and not the vast number of other health disorders, an accurate diagnosis is unlikely to be found.

Is Gluten a Toxin That Is Creating Your Symptoms?

Just as nutrition can help provide our bodies with the necessary tools to maintain our health, our diets can also introduce substances or toxins that can cause detriment.⁷ For many people, gluten falls into this category. It represents not a food but, rather, a toxin that creates adverse effects when it interacts with various body systems.

Detecting food intolerances can, of course, be very difficult, especially when the reaction is insidious and subtle. This is where the challenge lies when trying to truly find the problem's root. The lack of an "evidence trail" by standard diagnostic means imposes a significant roadblock to many physicians. What is required is a symptom-based approach with special attention to the body's systems. Incorporating this into a more global picture of health will lead to better chances of establishing the true cause. The HealthNOW Method contrasts dramatically from the current pervasive method of masking symptoms with drugs creating a false and temporary illusion of health.

What Parts of Your Body Are Affected by Gluten?

So what systems are important when trying to find the root cause of one's symptoms? As mentioned above, the digestive system and immune system are usually the primary systems involved for the gluten-sensitive patient, but secondarily, other systems can be affected as well. Nutritional deficiencies can affect the nervous system, the skin, blood cells and several other body systems. Often joint and muscle systems are symptomatic, as are hormonal balances.

Identifying symptoms and then aligning them with the affected systems of the body can give clues as to the root cause. When standard examinations and tests fail to reveal the problem, a search for other causes must be explored. Details of diet, activity, environment, travel, relationships and chronology can be helpful in narrowing the search for the cause. In essence, this infuses the art of medicine back into the evaluation

process. Today's practitioner is too quick, in our opinion, to send a patient on his or her way on the sole criteria of negative laboratory tests, which are mostly looking for disease or pathology. If a patient is suffering, it is our job to isolate the root cause. There always is one.

Angelita and Wendell—Different Symptoms, Same Root Cause

In comparing Angelita's symptoms to Wendell's complaints, one would never think that gluten was the problem for both individuals. However, both had persistent symptoms that escaped accurate diagnosis by standard medicine techniques. In retrospect, there are some similarities that may have been helpful in facilitating earlier diagnosis of gluten sensitivity. Both individuals had chronic symptoms that were not responding to treatments. Also, both had no obvious causes to their complaints based on common tests and diagnostics. Their persistent symptoms and lack of response to treatments should have extended the search for a root cause, and this should have then included a more detailed investigation into their diets and lifestyles. Throughout this book you will see how important these two health factors are in getting to the cause of people's symptoms.

You Can Be Sensitive to Gluten and Have No Digestive Complaints

Certainly, with a digestive system disorder, diet and food groups are very important to evaluate. This likely would have led to a diagnosis of gluten intolerance earlier for Angelita. For Wendell, dietary causes may not have been as apparent since no intestinal complaints were present, but diet affects all of our body's functions. Fatigue and sleep difficulties certainly can be the result of dietary substances. When obvious solutions failed to work in Wendell's situation, examination of dietary toxins should have been explored.

Gluten can definitely be one of those toxins for many people.

Approaching patients with a primary focus on their symptoms allows for a greater awareness of potential causes to their problems. Appreciating that cause and effect can be separated over long spans of time helps keep diagnostic considerations more open.

How Does Gluten Exert Such a Wide Variety of Negative Effects?

In exploring all the effects that gluten can have on our health, a detailed description of what gluten is, how it is broken down and how it can cause physiological effects within our bodies will be discussed. One of the important questions is, why does it seem as though gluten only recently became a health issue? Several factors have evolved that likely provide reasons for this.

Overall, gluten can have widespread effects and symptoms in a person who is intolerant to its digestion and metabolites (a substance produced by metabolism or breakdown). While this creates a daunting task for a diagnostician, it is no different than a variety of other nutritional disorders that have diffuse effects on many cellular functions throughout the body. Vitamin B12 deficiency is a good example of this as it can cause symptoms ranging from fatigue to numbness to memory loss to imbalance. Gluten intolerance, therefore, is no different in its variable manifestations of symptomatology.

What Percentage of the Population is Gluten Sensitive—Thirty Percent, Forty Percent?

Fortunately for Angelita and Wendell, they were able to eventually identify gluten intolerance as the root cause of their health conditions and subsequently improve their quality of life. In examining other case reports and literature, gluten's effects constitute a major cause in many patients' symptoms that have yet to be diagnosed, and as high as thirty percent of the entire population may have gluten sensitivity.⁸ This is an amazing figure! And the range of these symptoms can be quite broad.

Don't Give Up—Gluten May Be Causing Your Symptoms

By understanding how gluten ingestion can result in physical problems, patients can help clinicians investigate this as a possible cause of their complaints. Some may have become frustrated with a lack of an answer and decided simply to accept their symptoms. Others continue to struggle along from test to test, hoping that eventually that elusive diagnosis will surface.

The human body is indeed amazing and complex. Paying attention to diet, nutrition, environment and lifestyle can assist the body's own healing mechanisms. And in the case of someone who is gluten-intolerant, it can make all the difference in the world when this offending protein is avoided.