

Viewpoint: Self-diagnosed celiac disease is just the latest diet obsession of wealthy white people

Are you white and a little resentful that black people get their own cool disease, sickle cell anemia? There is good news for you. Celiac disease is all the latest rage and you can be any color at all and claim it.

How do you know if you are gluten intolerant? Elaborate assays? DNA? At least a blood sample? Nope, you just have to give up wheat and say you feel better and you are allowed to claim you have it. And proponents have even scarier numbers – they claim 97 percent of the people who have Celiac disease *don't know they have it*, so their ranks are really much bigger.

Unfortunately, some people really do have Celiac disease, an actual immune disorder – gluten is like poison to them, not an “I feel better if I don't eat a bagel” issue. Those sufferers are not the laughable one percent suddenly claiming they have Celiac disease, though. Maybe fashion disease people grew up in the 1990s when teachers wanted all kids to be labeled ADD, or they are the types who go to parties today and determine 80 percent of other party-goers have Asperger's. They are used to having *something*. They need it.

But for the real Celiac victims, there is good news, thanks to the fashion trend kind; due to the surge in gluten “sensitivity,” there are lots and lots of new products on the market to take your money. No surprise, since “Wheat Belly” was a New York Times bestseller. Even Lady Gaga is on the bandwagon, claiming she is going gluten-free in order to lose some weight, despite there being no scientific evidence that going gluten-free causes weight loss, other than any sudden shock to your system causes weight loss – if Lady Gaga went on an all Meat Dress diet she would also lose weight. Heck, some studies even show that if you burn more calories than you consume, you will lose weight. Modern dietary science is downright revolutionary like that.

But Lady Gaga is a rich, white girl so Celiac disease is the perfect self-diagnosis to make in 2012.

“There are a lot of people on a gluten-free diet, and it's not clear what the medical need for that is,” Dr. Joseph Murray, [co-author of various studies](#) from the Mayo Clinic , [told Jeff Korbek of the Lincoln Journal Star](#).

When I was younger, no restaurants had gluten-free options and gluten-free products were also hard to find in stores. I mean, wheat has been in bread for thousands of years and we have done okay. Not now, people have really changed a generation after I graduated college. Who says human evolution has stopped? Well, maybe it hasn't stopped, maybe Americans are just evolving *differently*. Social scientists want to believe, during an election year, that our brains are actually evolving differently for Republicans and Democrats, as an example. [A biology study by political scientists published in Trends In Genetics](#) says they can map 60 percent of political affiliation to the genome. Might it be that there is also a new, left-right biology correlation to food and other diseases?

So it would seem, at least according to trends about other beliefs. Along with believing more in UFOs,

psychics and astrology than right-wing people, left-wing people also believe they are hyper-sensitive to food. That could be genetic and may lend credence to often-dismissed kooky claims that they can taste GMOs or are allergic to them. Same with vaccines. Anti-vaccine people are overwhelmingly left-wing; while a right-wing state such as Mississippi is almost at 100 percent vaccination, left-wing Washington State is sinking below herd immunity levels and [kindergartens in Seattle report 25 percent non-vaccinated children](#). Maybe they don't need vaccines the way genetically inferior right-wing people do. It could be that left-wing people have co-evolved a much stronger immune system to go along with their super-smart brains. Well, except for celiac disease, they have a super-strong immune system.



No rash. She must be a Republican.

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What do non-scientists out in the real world feel about the disease trend? A chef on Straight Dope noted:

How about a chef's perspective? I do banquets for conventions and other large groups, and for the five years I've been doing this kind of work (been in foodservice for 27 years, but 5 in banquets/conventions), I've seen definite patterns.

Groups that skew toward membership with higher education levels and, usually, a more "liberal" or "left-leaning" tendency (environmental groups, women's groups, advocacy groups, Democrat Party fundraisers, any group where the women far outnumber the men, etc.) tend to have a much higher percentage of members with "special" dietary needs, including gluten-free, all manner of allergies, vegans/vegetarians, lactose-intolerant, etc., while lesser-educated, more conservative types of groups and groups with more men than women tend to cheerfully eat whatever the hell we put in front of them.

No real shock there. By itself, that is not evidence, but the people most inclined to have a "natural" fetish tend to invent reasons to justify it, and they can afford it. Faux Celiac disease is for the agricultural 1 percent – if you can buy organic food, you can afford gluten-free too.

Hopefully more companies catch on to this public health crisis but some seem to be showing real leadership on the issue. Chipotle's must be in a panic, I thought, because that is where the demographic

mostly likely to have trendy Celiac disease go for authentic Mexican food. Nope, they are already aware. Most of their menu is available gluten-free.

I'm tempted to go gluten-free myself. I am educated, I live in California, I assume I am supposed to be gluten-intolerant like an alarming chunk of middle class white women here are. Plus, I wouldn't want to miss out on this health boost the way I missed out on the other big dietary trends that promised to save America, like the Tapeworm Diet or the Macrobiotic Diet or that All Booze Diet.

We all remember how those made us thin and healthy.

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