

Gluten Free – Does it Make a Difference to Arthritis?

A few years ago, I was told by a woman I met at the Men's Shed that the reason she was Gluten Free was because of the positive difference it made to her osteoarthritis. I thought maybe I should give it a go.

So, for the past couple of years, I have been trying to avoid eating anything that contained gluten. However, that is not easy when you are out. Was I going to refuse a piece of that delicious cake that was being offered because it contained gluten? No. I decided that on such occasions it was not worth the hassle, and anyway, a little bit of gluten every now and again would not do any harm.

After about two years I was unable to say definitely, whether avoiding gluten (mostly) was alleviating the symptoms of arthritis or not. It seemed to help. My fingers were not so stiff in the mornings, but that was about all I could say. The jury was definitely out on that one. However, the jury came back in the latter half of last year with a definitive verdict.

It was travelling that gave me the answer. We went on a cruise around the Greek islands. At breakfast on the first morning, the first thing I noticed was that I seemed to have no option but to drink cow's milk with my breakfast cereal. Oh well, not to worry. It won't kill me. I don't like the stuff. Mum could never get me to drink it, but I used to use it for breakfast. And I could not find any gluten free options. I just ate normal bread for the toast. A day or so later I found a place where I could ask for gluten free bread for toast. After that, that is what I had with my breakfast. For other meals and dessert, I just ate what was on offer which often did contain gluten.

After the cruise we spent a couple of weeks roaming around Italy. Try going gluten free in the land of pizza and pasta. I figured it was just too hard, so I did not try to explain, especially in Italian; but by this time my joints were complaining. It got to the stage that I could not step up even **one step** without pain, and climbing the many steps I came across in Naples was agonising. Then I thought – maybe I should get off the gluten. I did, but it was not easy. However, after a few days the pain began to ease.

In the afternoons in Naples we often enjoyed a gelato to cool down. I chose the lemon flavour because it was rather icy like the gelato we are used to in Australia, but one day the lemon was different – it was particularly creamy. It was delicious, but immediately after I finished it, my tummy blew up like a balloon. Oh No! The penny finally dropped – I am lactose intolerant. That is why I have always hated milk! I had so successfully avoided milk all my life, that I didn't realise it before.

Well, that complicated things further. I knew I did not particularly like Mozzarella cheese. I always felt a bit ill after eating it. Again – I was in Italy. Mozzarella is everywhere. However, I discovered that Buffalo mozzarella was OK. I even found some lactose free milk in Naples.

I proved the gluten point again in Hong Kong on our latest trip. There were no gluten free options, so I just ate normal bread again. By the time we left there, my joints were again complaining. Again, it hurt to step up even one step.

The next cruise was much better at providing alternatives. There was a huge range of alternative milks available, a dedicated gluten free breakfast cereal section and another place to get gluten free bread. They failed on the dessert side though – all those yummy desserts had milk, eggs and gluten in them!

I have discovered the world of the gluten intolerant and how limited the choices are to those who cannot tolerate gluten. It is no wonder that the “**Free Range Chef**” in Albany took to making and selling gluten free sweet slices. She was sick of there not being anything for her out there.

So – back to the Gluten problem. Did getting off it help? **Yes, it did.**

Within a few days of avoiding it, my joints settled down and I was able to move without pain again. I know now that I have to be **very** strict about avoiding gluten. No thinking that just once won't hurt – **it will!**