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If gluten problems rule out whole grains, options exist

By Megan Murphy (Contact), Memphis Commercial Appeal
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After my article about whole grains last week, I had several calls from readers who appreciate the health benefits of whole grains, but have a gluten intolerance.

This means they have difficulty processing gluten, one of the proteins in wheat. Since wheat is the most common whole grain used in breads and baked products, they must avoid these foods.



Megan Murphy/Recipe for Health

Gluten intolerance, also called celiac disease, celiac sprue or a host of other names, causes an inflammatory reaction in the intestinal tract. Over time, this causes atrophy in some of the tissue, leading to all sorts of problems with nutrient absorption. Because of long-term malabsorption, those who have this condition run the risk of developing anemia, osteoporosis or many other nutrient-related diseases.

Symptoms of gluten intolerance include diarrhea, abdominal pain or fatigue, and failure to thrive in infants and children. But occasionally there are no symptoms, just problems like as anemia that are related to nutrient absorption.

Gluten intolerance is a genetic disorder, so if there are folks in your family who have it, you are more likely to have it as well. It is thought that about 1 percent of the U.S. population may have gluten intolerance. It is diagnosed more today than in the past, most likely because health professionals know better what to look for. Sometimes gluten intolerance is mistakenly diagnosed as irritable bowel syndrome, because of the similarity of the symptoms. Blood tests are needed to correctly make the diagnosis of gluten intolerance.

There are no medications that can cure this disease. While some drugs can alleviate the inflammation or pain associated with it, the only way to control it is to avoid gluten.

Gluten is found in wheat, barley and rye, and to some extent in oats. Folks who have a sensitivity to gluten must avoid these grains and foods that contain them. They can eat all vegetables and fruit, and meats and dairy are fine, although sometimes the inflammatory process makes lactose difficult to manage. But breads, many cereals, pasta and most common baked goods should be avoided.

People who have this disease must become label detectives, and must be cautious about eating out, since many restaurants use products that are thickened or pre-breaded with mixtures that include wheat flour.

The FDA does not yet regulate the term "gluten free" found on some packaging, but it states no objection to using "gluten free" on labels, provided it is truthful and not misleading. Regulating this term is in the works.

Today's recipe meets the accepted criteria for gluten free, using arrowroot starch and sorghum flour, rather than wheat.

You will also notice Salba seeds on the ingredient list. These seeds, cousins to chia seeds used in the popular Chia Pet, form a gel when mixed with water. This helps to thicken mixtures and add structure in baked goods like these muffins.

Salba seeds are nutritious and beneficial. In a University of Toronto study of 20 subjects with diabetes, postprandial (after eating) blood sugars were lowered, as well as systolic blood pressure levels when they ate 3 tablespoons of these seeds per day. These small seeds can easily be mixed with baked goods or sprinkled into cereal or yogurt.

Unless you are gluten intolerant, many of the ingredients in today's recipe are probably not in your pantry. Items like Salba seeds, arrowroot starch, agave nectar and sorghum flour are more likely to be found at a natural foods grocery store, a health food store or online.

Even for those without a gluten problem, these muffins are nutritious and worth adding to your repertoire.

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Gluten-Free Carrot Muffins

1 can (about 15 oz.) crushed pineapple, divided into crushed pineapple and juice

4 tsp. whole Salba seeds

1 cup cooked brown rice

½ cup sorghum flour (or teff flour)

½ cup arrowroot starch

2 tsp. baking soda

4 tsp. baking powder

½ tsp. salt

½ tsp. ground ginger

½ tsp. allspice

1 tsp. cinnamon (or substitute 2 tsp. pumpkin pie spice for all of the ginger, allspice and cinnamon)

2 tbsp. oil

½ cup agave nectar (can substitute honey)

½ cup crushed pineapple, drained (from the same can as the juice)

½ cup packed finely grated carrots (about 5 carrots)

2/3 to 1 cup chopped nuts (walnuts, macadamias or any mixture, or use a combination of chopped nuts, raisins and/or chopped crystallized ginger)

Glaze: (optional)

3 tbsp. powdered sugar

2 tsp. orange or pineapple juice

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Put muffin liners into muffin tin or grease tins. You can also use greased baby bundt pans if you have them.

Drain ½ cup of pineapple juice into a small bowl and add the Salba seeds to the juice. Set aside for 20 minutes. Reserve crushed pineapple.

Combine all the dry ingredients, leaveners and spices (brown rice through nutmeg) and mix thoroughly. Add chopped nuts. Combine honey or agave, molasses and oil. Mix thoroughly, then add carrots, ½ cup of crushed pineapple and the Salba seed/water mixture, which should look more like a gel at this point.

Mix all ingredients just until incorporated, then pour into muffin tins (or baby bundt pans, if using) until they are 2/3 full.

Bake for 8-10 minutes or until browned on top. Cool pan on wire rack for about 5 minutes, then turn muffins out of pan to cool completely.

If using glaze, combine the powdered sugar with just enough juice to make a pourable consistency. Glaze muffins while they are warm, but not just out of the oven. (If they are too hot, the glaze will be too runny and drip off.)

Makes about 18 standard-size muffins.

Per muffin: 118 calories, 5 gm fat, .6 gm saturated fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 19 gm carbohydrates, 1.5 gm fiber, 2 gm protein, 311 mg sodium.

Source: gluten.net/recipes