

Against the Grain

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~ By Kirsten Antony R.N., C.R. ~

As many of us gather around the dinner table for the holidays this year, some of us may have noticed that menu planning for some of our guests have changed over the years. Gluten-free, Paleo and Vegan are not new diets in America, but more and more of us have adopted a new way of eating for a multitude of reasons. Whether for health, medical, ethical, environmental or religious reasons, many people have changed their diets and this can lead to confusion for family and friends when it comes to trying to figure out what they can and cannot eat.

There are many “types” of vegetarians. Vegan is a vegetarian that does not consume or use any animal products. This includes any meats, fish or poultry. Vegans also do not consume eggs, dairy or honey. Many vegans avoid using animal products such as leather, fur and wool. Vegans are the most restrictive type of vegetarian. Another type of vegetarian is called Lacto-ovo vegetarian. These vegetarians do not eat meat, but do consume eggs and dairy. To break down this group further, ovo-vegetarians don't eat meat, but do eat eggs and lacto-vegetarians don't eat meat but do consume dairy products. Pescatarians do not eat red or white meat, but do eat fish and seafood. If you are inviting a vegetarian over for a meal, please do ask what type of vegetarian they are so you may best accommodate their diet.

Paleo diet stems from the idea that in the Paleolithic era, most calories came from animal protein sources and plants. Those on Paleo diets try to refrain from carbohydrate sources of food such as processed grains such as bread, pasta and corn products. Many people have difficulty processing carbohydrates and this diet may be used for health reasons. The main sources of food with the Paleo diet come from vegetables, meat, fish, eggs, fruit, nuts and oils.

The Gluten-Free diet is used for those who cannot consume gluten. Those with Celiac Disease and/or gluten intolerance can become very ill when gluten is consumed. Gluten is a protein found in the grains wheat, barley, rye, and triticale. Gluten can also be found in oats, not inherently, but by contamination in processing on equipment that may be contaminated from other grains. Many gluten-free products are available on the market these days. Gluten-free bread and pasta can be easily substituted when making a recipe and it can be hard to discern a gluten-free meal from one made with gluten products.

Personally, I have been eating gluten-free for the past 9 years for medical reasons and had been a vegetarian for a majority of my life. Gathering with family and friends for a meal can be difficult for those of us that adopt a different way of eating. We can be seen as different and strange. Gluten-free diets have had quite a bit of press over the past few years and I've heard many jokes made at the expense of those of us that are gluten-free. I often cringe when I hear these jokes; we live in a society where food is plentiful for many of us and free choice is available at the supermarket. Others need to become informed about why many of us choose to eat what we eat and please respect those choices.

Wishes to all of you for a healthy and happy Thanksgiving. May we all be grateful that we live in a country where we have choices in so many areas of our life, including at the dinner table.

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