

Could You Be Gluten Intolerant? Some May Be Suffering In Silence

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The gluten-free industry is booming, growing 27% since 2009 and exceeding \$6 billion in 2011, and fueled by an abundance of new products in 2010 and 2011 that bear a gluten-free claim.

However, despite an increase in popularity and product development, celiac disease and gluten intolerance could be widely undiagnosed, as according to recent Mintel research, just 1% of consumers say they've been diagnosed with celiac disease and only 8% overall say they are gluten intolerant/sensitive.

However, Mintel research suggests that number should be closer to 15%.

"The prevailing problem is that many Americans simply may not realize they are gluten intolerant/sensitive, or they may be ignoring signs and symptoms," says David Browne, senior analyst at Mintel. "While food companies may be overdoing it unnecessarily with gluten-free label claims that are appearing on everything from tomato sauce to scallops, the message is getting out and it's likely that many more consumers will engage in the sector, both for foods eaten at home and at restaurants."

According to Kerry Watson, SPINS natural and specialty product expert, "more doctors are testing for these conditions and more people are experimenting with a gluten-free diet. It's our responsibility as an industry to answer the needs of this growing population."

The industry seems to be taking notice. According to Mintel Menu Insights, gluten-free menu items have increased 280% from Q3 2008-Q3 2011. Meanwhile, Mintel's Global New Products Database (GNPD) found that product launches with a gluten-free claim nearly tripled in 2011 to roughly 1700 products as compared to 2007.

Alexandra Smith, Mintel's director of consumer trends added:

"Inspire's Factory Fear trend shows that food scares have pushed ingredients analysis up the agenda. Demand for 'free from' foods is on the rise as consumers become better educated (and more fearful) about allergies and additives. This has certainly increased awareness of the potential dangers in things like trans fats, high fructose corn syrup, and now gluten, but it may have also contributed to burnout. When we're constantly warned about new food dangers, we eventually tune out."

To hear more about the gluten-free food market, please attend David Browne's and Kerry Watson's presentation at the Natural Products Expo West in Anaheim, CA on March 8 at 12 pm PT, titled "Gluten-free: Long-term trend or short-term fad."

Source: Mintel GNPD, Mintel Oxygen Reports, Mintel Menu Insights, Mintel Inspire

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