

# AGA LIVING

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## IT MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING I ATE...

Something strange is happening to our relationship with food. Up to 75 per cent of the world's population is now lactose intolerant. Three in every 100 people have diabetes. Half a million are suspected to have undiagnosed coeliac disease. Is this the backlash for years of nutritional neglect or are we just not built the same way any more?



**B**ack in the early 90s heyday of Starbucks and the coffee revolution it used to be considered the height of cool, and not in the slightest bit awkward, to order a grande double de-caf soy latte from your barista and then change your mind half way through. In the Noughties it seems de rigueur for every other restaurant-goer to make their choice from the menu and then request that chef take out the dairy, or the nuts, or the strawberries from off the top. Are they being picky or discerning? Or are they doggedly trying to prevent a physical reaction so severe it could kill them as they sit at the dinner table?

Food allergies and intolerances are on the rise and no one is really sure why. It certainly seems to be something of a new age trend, something that affects our generation and our children's but not necessarily the peers of our parents or grandparents. Some attribute it to our modern dependence on nutritionally deprived convenience foods, slowing metabolisms and the resulting obesity epidemic; some blame agricultural chemicals, GM foods and artificial additives and preservatives for weakening our immune systems.

Many of you reading this might at this moment be feeling bloated or experiencing regular stomach upsets and not understanding why. The stark reality, and one which all food lovers will want to deny, is that your body could be rejecting daily doses of gluten (found in wheat), lactose (found in milk), glucose (found in carbohydrates) or any other number of fruit, vegetables or proteins and that the only

remedy is to exclude these from your life.

For many, allergens are identified by the appearance of mild but nonetheless unpleasant reactions such as swelling of the lips and face, shortness of breath or sore, red and itchy eyes. This can be brought on by contact with only the tiniest amounts of the offending food and symptoms can appear within minutes, or up to several hours afterwards.

The most severe allergies manifest themselves in anaphylaxis (pronounced ana-fill-axis), sometimes called anaphylactic shock. Someone having an anaphylactic reaction can endure multiple symptoms in different parts of the body at the same time, including rashes, swelling of the lips and throat, difficulty breathing, a rapid fall in blood pressure and even loss of consciousness.

Anaphylaxis can be fatal if it isn't treated immediately, usually with an injection of adrenaline (epinephrine). This is where the importance of quick and accurate diagnosis of an allergy comes in to play, so that those susceptible to anaphylaxis can travel equipped with emergency medication should the worse happen.

Ariana Bundy is a world-class pastry chef who has worked at some of the best hotels in Paris, New York and Los Angeles. Could there



be a more cruel twist of fate after years of perfecting your craft in French patisserie, laden with cream and butter, than to be told you are intolerant to dairy?

"I could not imagine going for a day without eating dairy, especially ice cream, my favourite dessert," she says in the introduction to her book, *Sweet Alternative*. "If I accepted it, that meant drastic changes in my work and in my lifestyle. Doctors also told me to stay away from soya, which is one of the easiest replacements for dairy."

"The physical discomfort became too much and finally outweighed the pleasures. No more eating ice cream from the tub or spreading brie on a hot baguette."

For Ariana it was back to the drawing board, having to forego everything she had learnt about baking and making desserts, slowly discovering that with the help of new ingredients such as gluten-free flour, coconut creams and low GI sugars, she could conjure up delicacies that looked and tasted just like the real thing. Her cookery book is a visual feast of safe to eat sweets and will come as salvation to all those for whom creamy puds had previously been off the menu.

For diabetics such sweet treats are usually completely off limits with sugar getting the blame for this most complex of conditions. In fact there is no hard proof that sugar consumption is the direct cause of diabetes, but whereas Diabetes UK and other professional bodies do not outlaw sugar intake, refined white sugars and even their sweetener counterparts are considered harmful and to be avoided at all costs.



Type 1 diabetes is the most serious condition, caused by an imbalance of insulin and glucose in the blood and needs careful monitoring to avoid the dangerous decline into a coma. It can strike people of all ages and levels of fitness whereas the much more common Type 2 is synonymous with overweight people in middle or old age.

Neil is a slim, fit 54-year-old who loves cycling. Following his Type 1 diagnosis his energy levels dipped to the point the daily



Leo, 65, is Type 2, the more common and manageable strain of diabetes, but as someone who always loved his food and seconds of pudding, he misses the freedom he once took for granted.

"Things I miss most are apple pie, chocolate eclairs, Mars Bars and puddings. I find eating out especially difficult – even gravy has sugar in it! I have been to hotels and restaurants which do not offer an alternative to dessert so you have to go without.

"I find a strong pair of spectacles helps when out shopping, so that I can read labels on food packets to check sugar content. Sugar can be camouflaged as sucrose, glucose and syrup. Food manufacturers have been putting excessive amounts of sugar and salt into products to increase their shelf life, as these are natural preservatives."

Could this be a factor in why thousands of people are now suffering from 'the silent killer'? Too much hidden sugar in the processed foods we have gorged on for so many years? Being cagey about what exactly is in the food they sell to us is no longer something manufacturers or retailers can get away with. Organisations such as Coeliac UK are pushing food companies to take more responsibility for their production methods and make visible to consumers those ingredients that could incur major health problems.

People with coeliac disease (pronounced see-lic) experience serious, whole body reactions to gluten, a type of protein found in cereals such as wheat, rye, barley and sometimes oats. More than an allergy or food intolerance, coeliac disease is a life-long autoimmune disease where the body's immune system attacks its own tissues, particularly in the lining of the gut (small bowel), and prevents normal digestion and absorption of food. If undetected it can lead to, amongst other things, anaemia, poor bone health and weight loss because your body is not taking in food properly. Symptoms can be confused with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or wheat intolerance and include bloating, abdominal pain, nausea, diarrhoea, excessive wind, heartburn, indigestion and constipation.

Coeliac UK reports that 600 newly diagnosed members join each month. One of the many benefits of joining up, aside from the latest news, research and advice on living with the condition is their annual Food and Drink Directory which lists around 11,000 foods, from tins of soup to ready meals, that are safe to eat and is free to members or available to anyone from the website [www.coeliac.org.uk](http://www.coeliac.org.uk) priced £10. ■

commute to work became too exhausting, leading him to take early retirement. He tries to lead a normal active life but admits he can never truly switch off from the condition.

"Everything I eat has to be measured per 100g of carbohydrate content, which turns to sugar energy and needs to be kept finely balanced," he says. "Old favourites like apple crumble now present a trio of sugar challenges: in the cooking of the fruit, the assembly of the topping and the traditional custard accompaniment. I'm forever doing calculations in my head!"

Advanced technology now means that instead of administering insulin through injections, Neil has a permanent electronic meter fitted to his side which, with some additional mental arithmetic, calculates and delivers the correct dose. But as he freely admits, "It is a machine and machines can malfunction. If it should go wrong I could die in my sleep."

#### Useful references

- The Basic Basics Diabetes Cookbook by Jane Frank, Grub Street, £8.99
- Sweet Alternative by Ariana Bundy, Conran Octopus £12.99, available from [www.octopusbooks.co.uk](http://www.octopusbooks.co.uk)
- Food Standards Agency [www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)
- Diabetes UK [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)
- Coeliac UK [www.coeliac.org.uk](http://www.coeliac.org.uk)

#### Cookbook giveaway

We have five copies of Sweet Alternative to give away. Send your name, address and daytime phone number to Sweet Alternative Giveaway, AGA Living, Harris Business Park, Stoke Prior, Worcestershire, B60 4DJ to arrive by 30 November. The first five entries pulled out of the hat will receive a copy of the book.

#### The Basic Basics DIABETES COOKBOOK

JANE FRANK



NO GLUTEN | NO DAIRY | NO SOY

sweet  
alternative



ARIANA BUNDY