

# Is gluten-free toxic?



I've been getting a lot of e-mail and social media messages over the past few weeks about a recent publication that purports that going off gluten-containing foods will increase a person's risk of arsenic and mercury toxicity.

The report, appearing in *Science Daily*, has clearly caused a stir amongst the gluten-free community. I mean after all, who wants to be poisoned, and from the sound of things, going off gluten might be doing just that!



Well, let's take a step back and first focus on the report's title: *Gluten-free diet may increase risk of arsenic, mercury exposure*. It's the last word that should tell you something. After all, how could *avoiding* something increase your exposure to toxic chemicals?

Indeed, the study did find higher levels of these toxins in gluten-free individuals, but it was because they ate *more* of other potentially contaminated foods in place of gluten-containing grains. Rice, for example, is a popular choice for people giving up gluten, and the data clearly shows a powerful risk for arsenic exposure in folks who eat a lot of rice.

In addition, we do know that fiber does help the body rid itself of toxins. And going off gluten might lead to a

reduction in fiber consumption.

So the take-home message here is that you're not going to increase your risk for arsenic or mercury toxicity by *eliminating* something (gluten-free foods in this case). But you may well increase this risk by consuming foods higher in toxins, or by limiting your fiber consumption.

*This article originally appeared on Dr. Perlmutter's website.*