

The last word

Allison ambushed by spelt

Teen goes from athletic to exhausted due to innocent mistake

By Amy Green

My daughter Allison was diagnosed with celiac disease when she was two years old. It hasn't always been easy, but the truth of the matter is, Allison has known no life other than one that is gluten free.

Today she is a healthy 17-year-old teenager who has amazing self control, along with other attributes she acquired because she has grown up with celiac disease.

The past year, however, was quite stressful. Our story may help someone who has been unknowingly suffering from the same experience.

In the summer of 2003, Allison participated in the Maccabi Games in Houston, Texas. Soccer is an aggressive sport, so it was not unusual for the players to fall down, as Allison did during the tournament.

A week later she began complaining of back pain. I took her to an orthopedist who put her on a steroid pack for five days and ran a bone scan and an MRI. The steroid pack produced no relief and nothing was found on any of the tests.

So she tried professional body massages. This seemed to help a bit. After two weeks the masseurs suggested a chiropractor. Sure enough, he found some misalignment in her spine and began treating her three times a week. She'd leave his office and feel better, yet the relief never lasted more than a few hours. A post-treatment test showed that her spine was looking good – but she was still in pain.

Needless to say, her junior year as a varsity soccer player did not go well. Allison was unable to participate because of the pain she was experiencing. The chiropractor's response was, "Maybe you should try another sport." In Allison's mind this was not acceptable. But when the basketball season started, she went out for the team.

Playing ball, visiting the chiropractor, and getting body massages became a way of life. Still she could not always participate and two months later, she quit the basketball team. This took a lot of courage. Quitting has never been an option in Allison's life. So she took up swimming because there was no impact when she was working out in the water.

In the spring, I took Allison to the pediatrician for her 17-year-old check up. He diagnosed Allison with celiac disease 15 years ago, so he asked her all the expected questions: "How are you doing in school? How is your gluten-free diet going?" She answered, "good" and "fine."

Then she proceeded to explain the chronic pain she been living with and our attempts to relieve it. His response was alarming. He wanted me to take her to a pediatric orthopedic doctor for a second opinion. We did, and the doctor seemed to very knowledgeable about celiac disease. He asked her many questions, including how she was doing on the gluten-free diet. Naturally, her answer was, once again, "fine."

Then the doctor suggested Allison have additional testing and blood work because he suspected the pain might be from fibromyalgia. We rushed home and got on the Internet to read all the information that we could about this disease. The treatment was scary. Allison thought she was losing her mind.

That evening while going through the mail I came across the latest edition of *Gluten-Free Living*. On the front page of the magazine were the words: "From spelt to spice – we answer your questions." I thought to myself, "spelt?" Allison had been eating spelt for about a year.

I quickly scanned the article to learn that spelt contained gluten! I rushed upstairs to Allison's room where she was doing her homework, and we sat together and read the article word for word. It must be spelt that was causing her chronic pain.

You can only imagine the guilt I felt (and at times still do) that I had introduced this grain to Allison thinking that it was gluten free. I wish I could recall where I heard or where I read about this, but I cannot.

The next morning I called the pediatrician and told him about the article. Celiac disease had always been of great interest to him. I told him that before I made any of the appointments for Allison's tests, I was going to omit the spelt from her diet and see how she felt. He agreed.

Within three days her belly felt good. Allison had thought that the bloating she was experiencing was just something that teenage girls were supposed to feel. She said she felt like she was premenstrual all of the time.

After omitting the spelt for about two weeks she began to feel relief in her bones and muscles. After a month, she felt great! In no time Allison was back on the road running and on the soccer field once again. Thank you to Ann Whelan and *Gluten-Free Living*.

Editor's note: This story originally appeared in the Spring 2005 issue of Gluten-Free Living in "the last word" column written by readers. At that time Amy and Allison Green had been gluten free for 15 years.