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Dunedin author offers recipes for gluten-free goodies

By Mary Shedden | Tribune Staff

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Sometimes, you want what you just can't have.

Carol Kicinski's great temptation is baked goods. But wheat, rye and barley-based foods trigger her gluten intolerance, subsequent migraines and a constant state of exhaustion.

"To me a croissant is the boy in high school who is really cute and a little dangerous. ... It took time to realize it's toxic and I didn't need it in my life," she says of being diagnosed with celiac disease 18 years ago.

Celiac isn't a food allergy. It's a digestive disease in which villi, tiny tissues that line the inside of the small intestine, are attacked. Without villi, nutrients can't be absorbed into the body, and symptoms such as anemia, fatigue, and even depression appear and the immune system is compromised, says the National Institutes of Health.

Initially, Kicinski thought she was cured by a six-week cleanse. She wasn't. Then she tried alternatives to fill her bakery fix, driving 25 miles from her Dunedin home for a single loaf of gluten-free bread that cost \$10 and "tasted like dirt."

"I ate bagels for breakfast, pasta for dinner and a sandwich for lunch," she says. "My diet

was so gluten-heavy."

Kicinski refused to accept that celiac disease meant tasty foods were off the table for life. For a while, baked goods and pasta were eliminated and she created her own recipes, such as substituting lasagna noodles with strips of zucchini. She got so into it, the amateur chef started sharing recipes on a blog she calls SimplyGluten-Free.com.

Eventually Kicinski's kitchen experiments led to gluten-free desserts and the discovery of gluten-free flour blends that could transform the most sinful baked delicacies into heavenly treats. Those recipes are among those featured in her first cookbook, "Simply ... Gluten-free Desserts" (\$26.99, Thomas Dunne Books).

"Who wants to go their whole life not eating a cookie? Not me," says Kicinski, who also writes for Martha Stewart's "G-Free Friday" online feature.

She says the estimated 2 million Americans living with celiac disease should enjoy decadent treats as much as anyone else. They just need to steer clear of gluten, the protein found in wheat, rye and barley.

The 150 recipes in Kicinski's book include a lot of grain- and dairy-free desserts, from coconut milk ice cream to candied orange slices. But desserts such as the mint chip cupcakes, Snickerdoodles and pound cake will appeal most to those with celiac.

That's because baking gluten-free isn't as simple as substituting a gluten-free flour into a mainstream recipe, she says. And baking at home improves the odds of the food not being contaminated by wheat-based food products.

"You can eat roast chicken and call it gluten-free, but you can't always do that with a red velvet cupcake."

Dessert books like this destroy the stereotype that gluten-free food tastes like cardboard, Kicinski says. People living with celiac disease should instead embrace their intolerance and discover all the foods they can enjoy.

"Once you realize you have the power to improve your health, it changes everything," she says.

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