

Vail Daily

Eagle-Vail woman eating better after life of suffering

Julie Shedko wants to start a support group for people with celiac disease

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[Vail, CO Colorado](#)
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EAGLE-VAIL, Colorado — Julie Shedko lived almost her whole life without knowing why she suffered when she ate.

Growing up and into adulthood, Shedko got stomach pains and severe migraine headaches after meals.

Doctors could not figure out why she felt so terrible. She had three surgeries on her sinuses in three years to get rid of excessive mucous. Doctors also prescribed her heart medication and painkillers, she said.

Need support?

Julie Shedko will hold the first meeting of her support group for people with celiac disease Feb. 7 at 6 p.m. at Avon Public Library, 200 Benchmark Rd.

For more information, call Shedko at (970) 376-7783 or e-mail Jshedko@msn.com.

“I would have ate a shoe if it made me feel better,” said Shedko, of Eagle-Vail.

A year ago, Shedko found out that she had celiac disease. That means she cannot tolerate gluten, which is in a great deal of foods and in their ingredients, including wheat, rye and barley and processed foods.

One out of 133 people in the United States have the disease,

according to the Celiac Disease Foundation. The disease occurs in five to 15 percent of the children and siblings of a person who has the disease. If untreated, the disease can lead to long-term conditions such as cancer, osteoporosis and lupus.

Holidays are difficult

Shedko grew up drinking carrot juice. Foods like milk and cheese made her bloated and gave her stomach cramps, constipation and diarrhea. Only recently has she gained back enough weight after she had been malnourished her entire life.

“It’s frustrating when you have those things going and people are like, ‘You don’t look good’ and you go, ‘I know I’m trying to figure it out,’” Shedko said.

Dr. Deborah Wiancek, who specializes in natural medicine at the Riverwalk Natural Health Clinic in Edwards, tested Shedko’s blood and diagnosed her with celiac disease.

Julie Shedko, who has celiac disease, shops for gluten-free food Wednesday at City Market in Avon. She wants to start a support group for others who have the disease that severely restricts what they can eat.



Preston Utley
Vail Daily

An advertisement for Minturn Steakhouse. The top part features a quote: "One of the best steaks in the state is the extra thick dry-aged New York!" attributed to Bill Husted from Rocky Mountain News. Below this, it says "Voted #1 Steak and #1 Minturn Restaurant!". The central image shows three people (two men and one woman) in a kitchen setting, with a large flame from a grill. A circular award logo from Vail Daily says "BEST of the VAIL VALLEY 2007". Text below the image reads "Find out why we've served OVER A MILLION people since 1982! Beef, it's what's for dinner." The bottom part of the ad says "Minturn STEAKHOUSE" and "The only thing missing is the Golf Course!" ZAGAT RATED EXCELLENT. It also lists the address "Main Street, Minturn" and phone number "827-4114".

The disease is often misdiagnosed — as irritable bowel syndrome, for example — and people live with it into their middle and older ages, Wiancek said. The diagnosis should be made at 2 years old, Wiancek said.

“I’m diagnosing more and more all the time,” Wiancek said.

The disease is treated not with drugs but by avoiding foods containing gluten, she said.

Still, Shedko has joint and bone pain from arthritis and she has osteoporosis. She points to a large, red rash on her leg, also a complication of her disease, she said.

“I’m just so thankful that I can eat something and enjoy it, and know that I’m not going to just suffer terribly,” she said.

Darren Shedko, Julie’s husband, said it was difficult to see his wife in pain.

“Not knowing why it was happening — that was the toughest part,” he said.

He has adapted to eating the same foods as his wife for breakfast and dinner, he said. At first, the couple could not find enough gluten-free foods, but they have found more foods at grocery stores lately, he said.

Only a couple restaurants serve gluten-free food, so options for going out to eat are limited, he said.

“Lunch is where I sneak away if I need a burger fix or something,” he said.

On vacations, Shedko has to find a place to stay with a kitchen and also shops for groceries.

“It’s not like a regular vacation,” she said.

Holidays are the most difficult when Shedko can’t eat the same foods as family members.

No pity parties

Shedko wants to start a support group for people in the Vail Valley who have celiac disease.

“I like the idea of being able to get together with like people because I think my whole life I felt like such an outcast,” Shedko said.

She wants the group to meet once a month on Thursdays and more often if people need to, she said.

Group members could give each other tips on which foods to buy, share cooking recipes and talk about how to cope with the disease, she said.

Many times foods don’t even list gluten in their ingredients and Shedko offers to help people shop for gluten-free foods. After all, people with the disease who plan to visit the valley already e-mail her about which restaurants have gluten-free menus before they visit.

Celiac disease is “definitely challenging, but you can’t have the pity party,” she said.

For more information on Celiac Disease, go to Celiac Disease Foundation’s Web site, www.celiac.org.

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