

Media Release

EMBARGO: 00.01 CET, THURSDAY, 11 May, 2017

Consumers misled by gluten-free foods, study finds

(Prague, 11 May, 2017) Gluten-free products cannot be considered as sufficient substitutes for their gluten-containing counterparts, prompting scientists to call for the reformulation of gluten free items with healthier raw materials to ensure healthy childhood nutrition.

The outcomes of the study¹, presented today at the 50th Annual Congress of the European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition, show that gluten-free items have a significantly higher energy content and a different nutritional composition to their gluten-containing counterparts. Many of the gluten-containing products – especially breads, pastas, pizzas and flours – also contained up to three times more protein than their gluten free substitutes.

The imbalances highlighted in the study could impact children's growth and increase the risk of childhood obesity.

The study assessed 654 gluten-free products, which were compared with 655 gluten-containing products. Further key findings include:

- Gluten-free breads had significantly higher content of lipids and saturated fatty acids
- Gluten-free pasta had significantly lower content of sugar and protein
- Gluten-free biscuits had significantly lower content of protein and significantly higher content of lipids

A gluten-free diet is followed as a life-long therapy for patients with coeliac disease, including children, which now affects around 1% of the European population². As gluten-free products replace many staple foods in the diet, such as bread and pasta, the intake of these products therefore play a very important role for many consumers. A growing number of people are also turning towards these products as a wellbeing choice, even when they are not diagnosed with coeliac disease.

ESPGHAN expert and lead researcher, Dr Joaquim Calvo Lerma, explains "As more and more people are following a gluten-free diet to effectively manage coeliac disease, it is imperative that foods marketed as substitutes are reformulated to ensure that they truly do have similar nutritional values. This is especially important for children, as a well-balanced diet is essential to healthy growth and development."

Experts are warning that not only are gluten-free products different in their nutritional composition, but consumers may not be aware of these unhealthy variances due to poor nutritional labelling.

Dr Sandra Martínez -Barona, fellow lead researcher, states that the nutritional labelling on gluten-free products should be clearer. She comments "Where nutritional values of gluten-free products do vary significantly from their gluten-containing counterparts, such as having higher levels of

saturated fat, labelling needs to clearly indicate this so that patients, parents and carers can make informed decisions. Consumers should also be provided with guidance to enhance their understanding of the nutritional compositions of products, in both gluten-free and gluten-containing products, to allow them to make more informed purchases and ensure a healthier diet is followed."

Daciana Sarbu MEP, Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, adds "EU law provides for mandatory nutritional labelling of pre-packed foods. However, food products that are not pre-packed, which could include gluten-free bread or pizzas, are not subject to the same labelling requirements. In this case, consumers could be less aware of important nutritional differences with potentially significant health impacts. I have always supported so-called 'traffic light' labelling to facilitate easy comparison between products for key nutrients including protein, fat and sugars."

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Notes to Editors

For further information, or to speak to an expert, please email media@espghan.org or call James M. Butcher on +44 (0) 1444 811 099.

About the experts

Dr Joaquim Calvo Lerma and Dr Sandra Martínez -Barona are both members of the The Research Group on Celiac Disease and Digestive Immunopathology at the Instituto de Investigación Sanitaria La Fe in Valencia, Spain.

About Daciana Sarbu MEP

Daciana Sarbu MEP is a representative the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats. She is the Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety in the European Parliament.

About ESPGHAN

The European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology Hepatology and Nutrition (ESPGHAN) is a multi-professional organisation whose aim is to promote the health of children with special attention to the gastrointestinal tract, liver and nutritional status, through knowledge creation, the dissemination of science based information, the promotion of best practice in the delivery of care and the provision of high quality education for paediatric gastroenterology, hepatology and nutrition professionals in Europe and beyond. Find out more by visiting www.espghan.org

About the 50th Annual Meeting of ESPGHAN

The 50th Annual Meeting of ESPGHAN is taking place from Wednesday 10 to Saturday 13 May 2017, in Prague, Czech Republic.

Every year the ESPGHAN meeting attracts the key opinion leaders in the field of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition from across Europe and all five continents, turning it into the largest conference of its kind worldwide. The Annual Meeting attracts over 4,000 experts from over 100 countries, all operating in the fields of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition, turning it into the largest conference of its kind worldwide. This year the meeting has received a record number of 839 accepted abstracts.

References

1. Martínez-Barona, S., Calvo Lerma, J. et al. Comprehensive analysis of the nutritional profile of gluten-free products as compared to their gluten-containing counterparts. Presented at the Annual

Meeting of the European Society for Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition. Prague, Czech Republic, 11 May, 2017.

2. The Association of European Coeliac Societies (AOECS). Homepage of www.aoecs.org [Accessed: 04.05.2017].