



In tolerant times

Given the right ingredients, food restrictions need not leave you out in the cold.

I'VE BEEN out of the restaurant business since last century but, looking back over all the years I spent as a restaurateur, I reckon I made a pretty good fist of it all. One thing that I could have done much better was to accommodate the needs of people with food allergies.

They had food intolerances and I was simply intolerant. In recent times I've become especially understanding of the requirements of a gluten-free diet because my youngest boy has a coeliac condition.

I've found it pretty easy to cook all the meals we like to have on the family table without gluten. Cheese sauces, crepes, thickened gravy, crumbed fish and even a good stuffing for a roast chook are all just as good without gluten as they were back when wheat flour was a kitchen staple. Savoury cookery is a cinch; dusting meat in gluten-free flour rather than wheaten flour before browning it makes no noticeable

difference to your casserole, and the lasagne I made tonight with gluten-free pasta was indistinguishable from one that might have been made with wheaten pasta.

Baking is an altogether different story. Bread and so many of the classic New Zealand baking recipes are based entirely on the properties of wheat flour that replicating those items with the gluten-free flour mixtures of rice flour, cornflour, tapioca flour, chickpea flour and others will always produce results that are to some extent unsatisfactory.

Cake and muffin baking can be much better with gluten-free flour because the gluten in wheaten flour can be over-excited by a cook who works the cake or

muffin batter too much or too vigorously and that will bind up the item at hand, making it dense, chewy and unevenly risen, often with a volcanic-looking peak at its centre.

This risk evaporates for the gluten-free baker. My boy is the master of a gluten-free chocolate cake that is better than any wheaten chocolate cake I've ever eaten. Much of its success is due to his determination to cream the butter and sugar thoroughly (which is always a requirement for exceptional baking) but the recipe he's developed really is a winner. It's everything a chocolate cake should be.

Last weekend he was my driver when I was a guest speaker at the Coeliac Society of New Zealand

AGM in Timaru. While he walked his puppy on the beach I spoke and then ambled through the gluten free foods expo the society had arranged. Among the fine range of pies, sausages, crumbed schnitzel and bread was the best news for my boy. Always left out when his mates get fish and chips and fried donuts, here was a couple who produce gluten-free products (battered fish, hot dogs and excellent doughnuts) for the fast-food industry. I took one of their cards to give to our local chippy so they might order in products to have on hand for gluten-free customers they can't serve at present.

■ www.goldengoose.co.nz has information on how to get your local to stock their products.



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