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Gluten intolerance a daily challenge

Support group brings help for young sufferers

By Rebecca Malcolm

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Alex Cameron knows she can eat blue jelly — and only blue jelly.

The Rotorua 10-year-old can probably decipher a label better than some adults and knows just what is hiding in her food.

It all comes with being diagnosed with Coeliac disease — an autoimmune disorder caused by an intolerance to gluten.

This week is Coeliac Awareness Week, with the awareness organisation saying 60,000 to 70,000 Kiwis are living with Coeliac disease and about 80 per cent of those are unaware they have the condition.

Since being diagnosed when she was 6, Alex and mum Kylee Douglas have discovered gluten is hidden in all manner of foods — including every other jelly colour.

She has had to cut out all foods containing gluten, which rules out wheat, pasta, oats and many other prepared snacks.

Alex said the toughest part was going to people's houses and shared lunches at school.

Ms Douglas and Louisa Roe, whose 10-year-old twins Jessica and Cameron have coeliacs, have formed a Rotorua support group for families with the condition which meets several

times a year at Abracadabra.

"It's for the children to get together so they can eat anything there and aren't restricted."

Most of the families involved tell the same story — kids with stomach problems, general unwellness, lethargy and some with failure to thrive. They all speak of repeated doctors' visits trying to get to the bottom of the problems before the kids were eventually diagnosed.

Mrs Roe said a difficulty with coeliacs was that some thought it was the same as opting to go gluten free and that they were jumping on the bandwagon.

"It's not a trendy diet when you have no choice."

She said eating out was difficult, even with the increase in gluten free food available, as those with coeliac could not eat food that had been prepared on the same surface or cooked alongside gluten.

"It's not a trendy diet when you have no choice."

Louisa Roe



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SAFE EATING: Jessica Roe, Aaron Ash, Cameron Roe, Alex Cameron, Abracadabra owner Nadia Goldbert, Cameron Guest and Anthony Guest at Abracadabra where they go as a “safe” place to eat which caters for their Coeliac Disease.

PHOTO/STEPHEN PARKER