



Gut Instincts: Dispatches from the Wide Open Space Between Sickness and Health (Kindle Single)

Heather Abel

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In 2000, Heather Abel, a journalist and grad student, awoke from sedation at NYU Hospital to find three doctors standing over her bed. They told her that she had the worst case they'd ever seen of a rare Scandinavian disease called celiac. At first, this diagnosis – and its requirement of total adherence to a gluten-free diet – seemed like the simple answer to a lifetime of strange symptoms including anemia, insomnia, pneumonia, mouth ulcers, missed periods, and neck pain so severe that for months preceding the diagnosis she hadn't been able to turn her head.

But even on the diet – and as glutenphobia erupted in this country, with nearly a third of Americans avoiding gluten —Abel still didn't feel well. When doctors, nutritionists, and websites all offered contradicting information on gluten and diet, she began to panic. How would she know what to eat?

In this powerful, wide-ranging and emotional story about the limits of medical knowledge, Abel discovers why she wasn't diagnosed with celiac as a child. She considers how environmental fears and Internet anecdotes lead people to avoid gluten. And she grapples with the question that confronts us all: how to live calmly, even joyfully, in the face of uncertainty.

Heather Abel worked as a reporter and news editor in Colorado and San Francisco and taught creative writing at the New School University and UMass Amherst. She lives with her family in western Massachusetts where she is finishing her first novel.

Cover design by Hannah Perrine Mode.

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