

THE POWER OF #HASHTAGS

According to Wikipedia, a hashtag is a word or an unspaced phrase prefixed with the hash character (or pound symbol or number sign), #, to form a label. Hashtags are a search tool used to find “like” content when using Twitter and other social media platforms.

When it comes to those following a gluten-free diet, the list of hashtags started small and has evolved into more than just a means of sharing photos. It has become a tool to combat negative publicity and to encourage action.

Here are some of the most commonly used and recognizable hashtags:

#GF, #glutenfree and **#gluten**

#CD and **#celiacdisease** in the U.S.

#Celiac or **#coeliac** in Europe

#Whatceliacseat to share food photos

#GS and **#glutensensitive** for those not diagnosed with celiac but with non-celiac gluten sensitivity

#Blackceliac and **#celiacsofcolor** are relatively new and signify a much-needed recognition of diversity in the community

Now here is where it gets more interesting. Hashtags can be credited to specific events: **#GFNotaFad**, **#GFisNOTaFad**, **#CeliacisReal**, and **#GlutenIsntAPunchline** can all be linked to “calls to action” to combat negative publicity and other situations.

The interview with Joy Behar on “Morning Joe” in January 2015 is credited with sparking **#CeliacisReal** after she chose to call the disease baloney, which it most certainly is not. Many people took to social media sharing pictures of themselves using this hashtag.

The 2015 NASCAR Super Bowl ad prompted the **#GlutenIsntAPunchline** hashtag because of the offending line from the commercial, “When our idea of danger is eating gluten, there’s trouble afoot. Yes, we the people have gotten soft.” According to a spokesman for NBC Sports, the line in question did not appear in the 60-second version of the spot that ran during the Super Bowl. The line was only featured in the online version of the commercial.

Do you think hashtags have the power to bring about change and/or motivate people to take action? I think we are at the tip of the hashtag iceberg and will see its use become inseparable from online petitions and calls to action as time moves on.

What hashtags do you use?

—Jennifer Harris

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