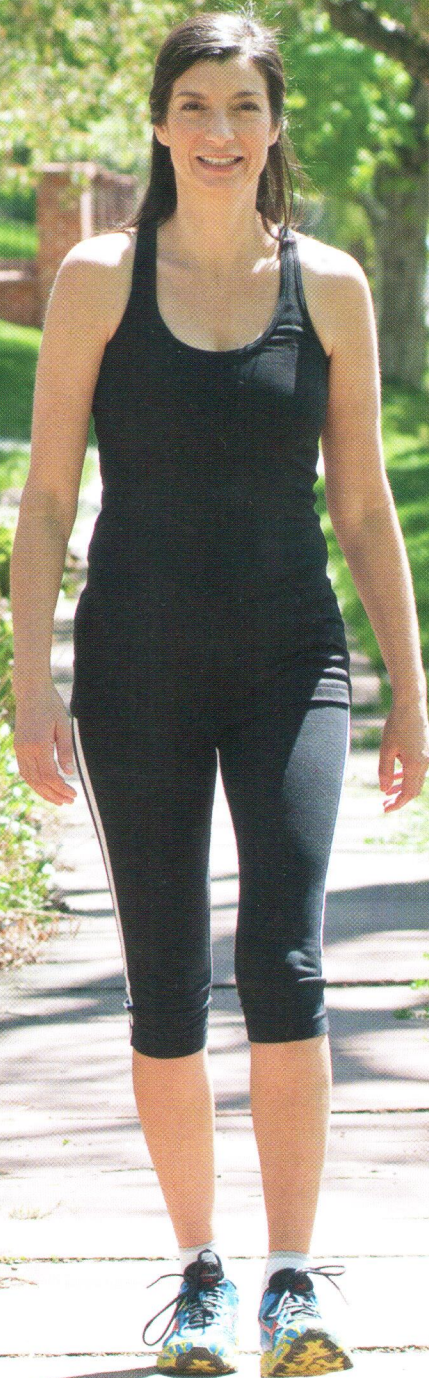


Elana Amsterdam

Enjoying Every Day

By: Tony Federico



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When Elana Amsterdam discovered that she had Celiac disease, she took it in stride. However, many years later when her son was diagnosed with the disease it was a different story. She couldn't imagine him going without all of the treats that are part of childhood and started making gluten-free versions of his favorite foods. She even offered to bring these treats to his school, making enough for everyone, so he could take part in the celebration. Requests for recipes led to her blog ElanasPantry.com and over the years, her readership has grown. She has since authored several books, including the newly released *Paleo Cooking from Elana's Pantry* (Ten Speed Press). We sat down with Elana to talk to her about going gluten free, writing recipes for her blog and how she manages to keep herself grounded in the process.

(Tony) What is the process of developing a recipe for Elana's Pantry?

(Elana) Lots of testing, until the end result is perfect. I've tested some recipes more than 30 times, but in general, bread recipes are the most demanding. Sometimes I make changes in each batch as small as adjusting the baking soda by an 1/8 of a teaspoon. Testing is fun, though it can also be a bit tedious sometimes. Most of the leftovers get eaten and the rest go into the compost heap.

When it comes time to put the recipe on the site, we do the photo shoot which is very creative and a lot of fun. I've really gotten into photography in the last year and enjoy it a lot.

What is in your pantry right now?

Nut butters, packaged kale chips (our go to fast food) and coconut milk, lots of it! Also coconut oil, coconut butter and cacao powder.

What is your favorite ingredient?

I've been using almond flour for more than a decade and absolutely love it, but I have to say that it's a tie between almond and coconut flour. I like them because they yield incredible tasting results; are single ingredient flours, meaning they do not require a long list of other flours to make them work and they are high in protein and fiber, respectively.

I source from Nuts.com and Honeyville almond flours, they yield consistently wonderful results and I highly recommend them. I do not recommend using homemade almond flour, it likely will not work in my recipes.

What is your biggest recipe "hit"? Any "misses"?

My biggest miss? Everything is a miss while it's under development. My biggest recipe hit is bread. I think this is because everybody wants to break bread with their friends and loved ones. It is a universal food from the communion wafer to the challah. Readers love the existing bread recipes and consistently ask for more bread recipes. People want their bread!

How did your relationship with your fans and readers develop?

I often post questions on social media to find out what my readers are up to and interested in; this type of dialogue is wonderful for developing a connection with my readers and it's something I've cultivated since I launched ElanasPantry.com in 2006. One recipe that came from this interaction was the idea for Paleo Snickerdoodles!

How does the experience of writing a blog compare to writing a book?

Writing a blog is more of an ongoing dialogue with my readers than writing a book. The blog is ever evolving and very "alive." My books have come about as a result of my editors at Random House watching what I put on my blog, noticing a theme that seems popular and then asking me to write a book on that subject matter.

I personally don't think that anyone should buy my book without looking at my blog first; there are 700 free recipes on my website that they can peruse. If they decide that my recipes are a good fit for them, then it may make sense for them to purchase my book.





As someone who has been gluten-free for many years, what are your thoughts on the current gluten free trend?

I find the gluten-free trend interesting. It's great that there is more awareness and that more people are being diagnosed with celiac disease. Hopefully more people with celiac and gluten intolerance will get the help and advice they need to change their lives for the better.

If someone suspects that they might have a problem with gluten, I would suggest that they get a full panel of celiac tests, specifically looking for auto-immune antibodies such as anti-gliadin antibodies (both IgA and IgG), anti-endomysial antibodies, anti-tissue transglutaminase antibodies and total IgA level. They should also get tested for the genetic markers. I also think it is best to have all of the aforementioned blood tests performed by an MD.

What do you think are the benefits of the Paleo diet vs a gluten free vs the standard American diet (SAD)?

Well, I'm a huge fan of the Paleo diet. For the most part, it cuts out processed junk food. I don't think that's the case with gluten-free. There is an entirely new industry evolving around gluten-free and many of the products are simply gluten-free versions of the SAD, so it's important to be careful when diagnosed with celiac or gluten intolerance (serious health issues), to look at overall diet and health and not just go in for a quick fix approach, as that may not be as beneficial.

What other aspects of the Paleo lifestyle do you incorporate into your daily life?

I am one of those people that needs nine hours of sleep a night. When I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, the first thing we did was put tin foil and army blankets over the windows of the bedroom so that I could really start sleeping again. I hadn't yet heard of Paleo, though had unwittingly adopted many of its tenants. I also walk every day in the beautiful mountains of Colorado and do light weight lifting or resistance training 4-5 days per week. All of this keeps me happy and healthy.

Could you talk about how sustainability factors into your lifestyle?

I make my own cleaning products to reduce the waste of plastic bottles and avoid bringing unnecessary chemicals into my home. I use glass in the kitchen to store food, rather than using plastic, in order to reduce our use of petrochemical products, as well as lower our contact with endocrine disrupting xenohormones. Using glass also lowers our kitchen expenses as it is far cheaper than plastic. I also grow a lot of fruits and vegetables in our yard. Instead of flowers I plant kale in the spring which the boys harvest for dinner almost every night during the summer.

What have been the biggest challenges of raising a gluten-free/Paleo family?

I am strictly grain-free and haven't eaten corn, rice, etc. since 2001. I figured out back then that I got very sick from eating not just gluten, but grains as well, so I have no interest in those foods. My family is not Paleo, though I do have one son with celiac and he is 100% gluten-free. I have no issues with him sticking to that diet. He is 14 now and very motivated to keep healthy and strong (he's a competitive baseball player) and he keeps himself on the gluten-free diet. Of course, dinner every night is Paleo, however, the boys do use their allowance and money they earn to buy junk food of the worst sort.



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How do you manage going to restaurants and social situations?

I always make it a priority to be extra polite to the server and acknowledge how busy they are, and that I know that taking my order is extra work, because that's the case. I also explain what my restrictions are and then ask them to help me choose what would be easiest for the kitchen to throw together. I get a great response! For social situations the key word is social. I eat beforehand, unless it is good friends who know the way I eat. I don't like to inconvenience anyone.

Some people criticize recipes for Paleo breads, cookies, cakes, brownies. What is your response to this criticism and what role do you think these types of food should play?

I think everyone needs to eat the foods that they feel good eating. I go through phases. Sometimes I don't eat desserts for a couple of months. Other times I eat them often and find that they're great after working out when I'm in a rush and looking for quick nutrient dense foods that are mighty tasty.

How do you maintain balance between work and family life?

My husband and I don't believe in work-life balance, we think it's all part and parcel of the same thing. My family is involved in my blogs and books by eating what I cook, they're a captive audience every night at 6:30pm!

What is your ultimate vision for Elana's Pantry?

Right now I'm very focused on supporting the launch of my new book, *Paleo Cooking from Elana's Pantry*. I'm particularly excited to have been invited to speak at an event this September in North Carolina called Bookmarks that has several thousand people attending. When it comes down to it though, my goal is to be right where I am and enjoy it each day.

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