

G-Free to Be

Actor Jennifer Esposito helps others with celiac disease

When Jennifer Esposito was finally diagnosed with celiac disease three years ago, the actor was both shocked and relieved. “It was hard, but it was also the day I realized the person I once knew as ‘me’ was gone,” says Esposito, 39, who plays detective Jackie Curatola on the CBS hit police drama *Blue Bloods*.

Misleading advice and a delayed diagnosis cost Esposito precious “life” time as she searched for the reasons behind a litany of unexplained ailments, she says. Now she’s determined to save others from the same pain and frustration by raising awareness of celiac disease—also the goal during May, National Celiac Disease Awareness Month.

Shortly after learning she had celiac disease, Esposito launched Jennifer’s Way, a website and blog (www.jennifersway.org) to help others “learn to live again, gluten-free.” She has nearly 6,500 followers on Twitter (@JennifersWayJE), and a cookbook, food product line, and bakery in New York City in the works. “This is so rewarding, the second chapter of my life,” she says. “I’m grateful to be able to give something back.”

Two million people in the United States have celiac disease. The condition isn’t a food allergy; eating gluten causes the body’s immune system to damage the fingerlike villi lining the small intestine that allow nutrients from food to be absorbed into the bloodstream. As a result, the body is not able to take in nutrients effectively.

Growing up, Esposito recalls telltale signs as a youngster and a life regularly interrupted by illness, even as she tried to lead a healthy lifestyle. She says she learned to map out the closest bathroom; celiac can bring on symptoms like queasy stomach, gas, and diarrhea. Celiac disease also tends to run in families. Esposito’s older sister, Suzanne, was eventually diagnosed.

Gluten shows up in products containing wheat, barley, and rye. And it can “hide” in soy and other sauces, processed foods, and medicines and vitamins.

“Now I’m a food detective—food gives me life, but I know it could also harm me,” Esposito says. “Listen, for your body will tell you what it wants and needs.” —Stephanie Stephens



LEFT: STEPHEN LOVEKING/GETTY IMAGES; STEVEN PERILLOUX



On her show, de Cadenet (right) gets up close and personal with celebs like Gwyneth Paltrow.

Woman to Woman

Amanda de Cadenet’s *The Conversation* celebrates girl talk

How’s this for a Mother’s Day treat? Lifetime Network’s new series *The Conversation* with Amanda de Cadenet debuted April 26, with alpha females Gwyneth Paltrow, Jane Fonda, Portia de Rossi, and Lady Gaga (to name a few) discussing things women gab about with their closest girlfriends.

Hosted by former British TV presenter and current Los Angeles-based photographer Amanda de Cadenet and executive-produced by actor Demi Moore, the show explores women’s health and well-being, tackling topics like body image, pregnancy, work/family balance, aging, and grief. It celebrates women’s penchant for emotional intimacy, underscoring research that links female friendships with longevity and good health.

“Creating a community of girlfriends is one of the most important things we can do,” says de Cadenet, 40, who wants to inspire honest dialogue. “My girlfriends have carried me through everything—the show role-models those conversations.”

A mother of three and onetime tabloid fixture, de Cadenet is the ex-wife of Duran Duran’s John Taylor and current spouse of The Strokes guitarist Nick Valensi—and the first to say she’s learned every lesson the hard way.

Her guests are equally frank. In an age of publicist-controlled sound bites, it’s unusual to hear Paltrow describe her difficulty connecting with her second baby, Fonda admitting she’s only recently begun to feel fulfilled, de Rossi discussing the eating disorder that shrunk her frame to a skeletal 82 pounds, and Gaga insisting she wouldn’t dare undo her teenage mistakes.

For a who’s who of guests who have signed up to dissect womanhood, go to www.theconversation.tv. —Lauren Paige Kennedy