

Gluten free diet

Getting on a gluten free diet is not easy, but is essential if you have Celiac disease. A gluten free diet excludes the protein gluten, which is found in grains such as wheat, barley or rye. If you have celiac disease, gluten causes a problematic immune reaction in the small intestines. This reaction results in damage to the inner surface of the small intestine and an inability to absorb certain nutrients from the food. Initially, following a gluten free diet may be frustrating. But with time, patience and creativity, you'll find there are many foods that you can eat and enjoy. There are support groups out there for people with Celiac disease that can be very beneficial.

Avoid these gluten-containing grains

Avoid all foods or food ingredients made from many grains, including:

- Wheat, barley, and rye
- Farina
- Graham flour
- Semolina
- Durham
- Bulgur
- Kamut
- Kasha
- Matzo meal
- Spelt (a form of wheat)
- Triticale

Oats may not be harmful for most people with celiac disease, but oat products are frequently contaminated with wheat, so it is best to avoid oats as well.

Avoid these products unless labeled 'gluten free'

The following grains are gluten free as grown, but may be contaminated by other grains during harvesting and processing. Verify that these products are processed in a gluten free facility before consuming them:

- Amaranth, Buckwheat, and Quinoa

Most foods made from grains contain gluten. Avoid these foods unless they're labeled as gluten free or made with corn, rice, soy or other gluten free grain. It's also important that they're processed in a facility that is free of wheat or other contaminating products:

- Breads, cereals, crackers, croutons, and pasta
- Cookies, cakes, and pies
- Soups
- Gravies, salad dressings and sauces (including soy sauce)
- Candy
- Imitation meat or seafood
- Processed lunch meats
- Self-basting poultry

Many other products that you may consume or that may touch your mouth have ingredients that contain gluten. These include:

- Food additives, such as malt flavoring, modified food starch and others
- Medications and vitamins that use gluten as a binding agent
- Lipstick and lip balms
- Toothpaste
- Postage stamps
- Play dough

Safe foods in a gluten free diet

There are still many basic foods allowed in a gluten free diet. These include:

- Fresh meats, fish and poultry (not breaded, batter-coated or marinated)
- Most dairy products
- Fruits and vegetables
- Rice and potatoes
- Gluten free flours (rice, soy, corn, and potato)

Fortunately for bread and pasta lovers with celiac disease, there are an increasing number of gluten free products on the market. Note that “wheat free” doesn’t necessarily mean gluten free. The product may still contain rye, barley or spelt ingredients that contain gluten.

How to tell what’s OK

- Read the label before you purchase any food product or call the manufacturer

You can still eat out

- Select places that specialize in the kinds of foods you eat. You may want to call the restaurant in advance to discuss menu options and your dietary needs.
- Be a repeat customer
- Seek and share ideas. Ask members of your support group for suggestions on restaurants that serve gluten free food.
- Follow the same practices you do at home. Select simply prepared or fresh foods and avoid all breaded or batter-coated foods, gravies and other foods with obvious or questionable ingredients.

What if you eat gluten?

If you accidentally eat a product that contains gluten, you may experience abdominal pain and diarrhea. Some people experience no signs or symptoms after eating gluten, but this doesn’t mean it’s not damaging the small intestine. Even trace amounts of gluten in your diet may be damaging, whether or not they cause signs or symptoms.

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