

Getting Started with Gluten-Free

What's the difference in gluten intolerance and Celiac disease?

While the differences in these terms can be confusing, the good news is that the treatment for both is exactly the same. Gluten intolerance is an abnormal response by the body to the gluten proteins found in wheat, rye, and barley as well as products derived from them. Celiac disease is simply the most severe gastrointestinal manifestation of gluten intolerance. It involves destruction of the lining of the intestines which leads to inability to absorb nutrients as well as other issues.

Does everyone need to follow a gluten-free diet?

No. Only those who are shown to be intolerant of it or those who feel better when they don't eat it. Of course, it is perfectly safe for anyone, even children, to follow if it is easier for the whole family to participate.

How do I know if I need to try a gluten-free diet?

If you have tested positive for the antibodies to gluten or the genes for celiac disease then you should definitely be gluten-free. Also, anyone who has any of the following should undergo a gluten-free trial of at least 3 months to see if improvement is noticed:

- autoimmune issues (Hashimoto's/autoimmune thyroiditis, lupus, RA, etc)
- neurologic issues (migraines, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, epilepsy, etc)
- neurobehavioral issues (ADD/ADHD, autism)
- iron deficiency anemia
- osteoporosis
- gastroenterology issues (IBS, inflammatory bowel disease, unexplained abdominal pain, liver disease, etc)

If symptoms improve on a gluten-free diet, then it is recommended that it be continued regardless of whether or not you've been tested for gluten intolerance. Unfortunately there is no agreed upon test that will accurately diagnose gluten intolerance 100% of the time.

What is a gluten-free diet?

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. People following a gluten-free diet must avoid these grains as well as any ingredients derived from them. Obviously, things like bread, pasta and other things made from flour must be avoided, but there are other foods that are not so obvious. Many processed foods, sauces, soups and salad dressings contain gluten. Oats are gluten-free but are often contaminated during growing or processing in facilities that handle wheat so only certified gluten-free oats should be consumed.

Is a gluten-free diet healthier than a traditional diet?

That depends on how you define “healthier”. For the person with gluten intolerance, a gluten-free diet is definitely healthier for them. But for the general population, a gluten-free diet may not be a healthier choice. Processed “gluten-free” products often are higher in sugar and lower in fiber than their gluten containing equivalents. There is no evidence that a gluten-free diet will benefit the general population especially in regards to weight loss.

How do I get started?

Once people start thinking about going gluten-free, the first question most ask is “So, what CAN I eat?!?” Sometimes facing a dietary challenge like this is overwhelming and we need to just slow down and take it one step at a time. You will learn and improve day by day and before you know it you’ll be amazed at how far you’ve come. Start with eliminating the obvious things first and then fine tune little by little.

Step One – Eliminate the obvious foods from your diet. This will be any foods made out of wheat, rye, barley and non-GF oats. This means breads, pasta, baked goods, cereals, tortillas, etc unless you are sure they are gluten-free. Remember that potato bread, sourdough, etc still use flour made from wheat so they are not safe. Use corn tortillas instead of flour tortillas or even iceberg lettuce to wrap up your favorite sandwich fillings. Oil and vinegar salad dressings are a safer option as many salad dressings use wheat starch as a thickener. Once you get the hang of this, move on to step two.

Step Two – Start watching for “hidden” sources of gluten. This is when you will have to get good at reading labels. You will have to learn all the ingredients that gluten can hide in. Try not to get overwhelmed. Just do the best you can and keep moving forward. Also, many major grocery stores, like HEB and Kroger, have printable lists on their websites that you can download of everything in their store that is gluten-free. This is handy to carry around with you. The following is a list of things to watch for on ingredients labels:

- Barley (flakes, flour, pearl)
- Breeding and bread stuffing
- Brewer's yeast
- Bulgur
- Durum (type of wheat)
- Farro/Faro (also known as spelt)
- Graham flour
- Hydrolyzed wheat protein
- Kamut (a type of wheat)
- Malt, malt extract/syrup/flavoring
- Malt vinegar
- Malted milk
- Matzoh, matzoh meal
- Modified wheat starch
- Oatmeal, oat bran, oat flour, and whole oats (unless they are from pure, uncontaminated oats)
- Rye bread and flour
- Seitan (A meat-like food derived from wheat gluten used in many vegetarian dishes)
- Semolina
- Spelt (A type of wheat also known as farro or faro, dinkel)
- Triticale
- Wheat bran
- Wheat flour
- Wheat germ
- Wheat starch

Continue to check the labels everytime you buy a product in case the manufacturing has changed. Also remember that **“wheat free” does not equal gluten-free!**

Step Three – Learn to contact people directly. Many food manufacturers are happy to answer your questions about their ingredients if you give them a call or write an email or letter. Some ingredients such as modified food starch, starch, or dextrin may have been derived from wheat and the USDA does not require stating this on the label. In this case, you will have to contact the food manufacturer to verify the source of this ingredient. Remember the adage – **If in doubt, go without!**

Step Four – If you are very sensitive to gluten, you may have to start examining things that you hadn't thought of before, like toothpaste, make-up and medicines. All of our compounded prescriptions as well as our vitamins are gluten-free. And there are many gluten-free toiletry items available on the market if you just do a little research to find the ones that suit your needs.

Step Five – Now's the time to start trying new things you may never have had before. Naturally gluten-free grains, like sorghum, buckwheat and teff, are widely available. Also widely available online are the recipes you will need to learn to cook them.

Adding nutrients to my diet

Many gluten containing foods, like bread, are fortified with nutrients that may not be present in their gluten-free counterparts. In order to make sure you are getting adequate nutrients from your diet, ensure you are eating a variety of different colored vegetables and especially leafy greens. Lentils, nuts and seeds are also a great addition to your diet to boost nutrients.

You can also ensure you are getting enough fiber by increasing your intake of low sugar fruits (apples, oranges, berries, etc), lentils, beans, nuts and non-starchy vegetables like broccoli, leafy greens, and squash.

What about alcohol?

Wines and hard liquor/distilled beverages are gluten-free. Beers, ales, lagers and malt vinegars made from gluten containing grains are not distilled and therefore are not gluten-free. There are several good gluten-free beers on the market in the United States now.

So I can never have wheat bread again!?

It is natural to go through a mourning process when you first go gluten-free. Your mind will even remind you of things you can't eat that you haven't thought about in years! Try to stay focused on all the good foods you can eat and remember you are doing this for your health so it is important to keep as a priority. If you mess up (accidentally or on purpose), don't panic. Just start fresh and move forward.

How am I going to eat in a restaurant?

Select your restaurant carefully. Finer dining establishments are more likely to have the time to take to check ingredients for you. Always request a gluten-free menu – you'll be surprised how many restaurants will have them. Also, check their website. Some restaurants (like Buffalo Wild Wings) print their ingredients labels for all of their menu items online. Try not to dine during the restaurant's busiest

periods so the server and/or chef has time to discuss your needs with you. Before you eat, confirm that your order is your “special” meal as requested. Your health is at stake so don’t be afraid to be a nuisance. Make sure to thank your server and the chef, if possible, and tip generously to compensate them for their extra time. This will make them even more willing to help the next gluten-free customer they encounter.

What about when I am travelling?

If you will be driving, it is worth packing some foods that you know are safe for you to eat. If you are using a cooler, ice will be readily available at convenience stores and hotels. Some airlines offer gluten-free meals, but it may be a risk as you will not be able to verify ingredients. It is probably a better option to pack food if you can. Dried fruit and nuts pack well. For meals when travelling, refer to the same guidelines as dining out.

Flours, Grains and Thickening Agents

Flours, Grains and Thickening Agents Allowed	Amaranth	Arrowroot	Bean Flour	Buckwheat	Corn Bran	Corn Flour	Corn Germ	Corn Meal	Corn Starch	Millet	Quinoa	Potato Flour	Potato Starch Flour	Rice Bran	Rice Flour (white)	Rice Flour (brown)	Rice Flour (sweet)	Rice Polish	Rice Starch Flour	Sorghum Flour	Soy Flour	Tapioca Starch	Teff
Good thickening agent		X							X	X			X				X		X	X		X	
Good combined with other flours	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Best combined with milk and eggs in baked product	X					X	X					X	X		X	X	X	X			X		
Grainy – textured products							X	X							X	X							
Drier product than with other flours												X	X		X	X							
Moister product than with other flours			X							X	X						X						
Adds distinctive flavor – use in moderation					X													X			X		X
Short shelf-life														X		X		X			X		
Browns and fries nicely												X								X			

Much of the information contained in this handout was obtained from Gluten Intolerance Group. You can find a local branch at www.gluten.net.