



# Starting Your Gluten-Free Eating Plan

You have been diagnosed with celiac disease or as gluten intolerant. This handout will get you started on what you should and should not eat or drink.

## What is gluten?

Gluten is a protein that is found in wheat, rye, barley and any ingredient derived from these three grains. It is the substance in flour that helps form the shape of a food product, acting like a glue to hold ingredients together.

## What is celiac disease?

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disease. When people with celiac disease eat gluten, their immune system produces antibodies that attack the small intestine like it would a virus. Over time, the small intestine becomes damaged, sometimes to the point where it can't properly absorb nutrients, which leads to anemia, vitamin deficiencies, stomach pain and/or weight loss. Celiac disease can be difficult to diagnose because it affects people differently.

## What are symptoms of celiac disease and gluten intolerance?

There are more than 100 possible symptoms that a person diagnosed with celiac disease can experience, while some people have no noticeable symptoms at all. Most of the symptoms revolve around the digestive system and include diarrhea, constipation, excessive bloating and gas, stomach pain and mouth ulcers or canker sores. Other symptoms can be more systemic like anemia, short stature, vitamin deficiencies, chronic headaches, depression, weight loss or failure to thrive. Gluten intolerance is considered a non-celiac gluten sensitivity where symptoms include feeling sick, bloated or tired after eating gluten.

## What are ways to treat celiac disease and gluten intolerance?

Avoiding gluten, which is in ingredients derived from wheat, rye and barley, is the only way for the intestines to begin to heal and stop celiac disease symptoms. Avoiding gluten will also help symptoms for those with gluten intolerance.

## Recommended Foods for a Gluten-Free Eating Plan

The following food groups are naturally gluten-free:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Proteins including meat and poultry, fish and seafood and beans, legumes and nuts
- Dairy

The following grains and starches, legumes and seeds are naturally-gluten free:

- Amaranth
- Arrowroot
- Beans
- Buckwheat groats/kasha
- Cassava
- Chia seeds
- Corn
- Flaxseed
- Gluten-free oats
- Millet
- Nut flours
- Potato
- Quinoa
- Rice
- Sorghum
- Soy
- Tapioca
- Teff

There are many food items that contain gluten that have gluten-free alternatives. These food products can be found in most grocery stores. The following is a list of foods that have gluten-free substitutes:

- **Cereal:** Many cereals contain gluten or wheat-based ingredients. Some cereals are made from corn and rice, which are gluten-free. When shopping, look for the words “gluten-free”. A common ingredient in cereals to watch out for is malt flavoring or extract, which contains gluten.
- **Bread:** Your typical bread on the grocery store shelf, even sourdough, that is made from white or wheat flour, rye or barley ingredients, contains gluten. There are several gluten-free bread options available; some are shelf stable and some will be frozen to preserve the freshness of the bread. Gluten-free breads will have a different texture than wheat containing breads as when you take out the gluten, you lose some of the soft, gooey texture. Gluten-free breads will be made from a mixture of gluten-free flours and starches and will use xanthan gum to mimic gluten, allowing it to hold together. Many gluten-free consumers think that gluten-free bread tastes better toasted.
- **Oats:** Oats can be harvested and processed in the same facility or vicinity as wheat, rye and barley, creating a risk for cross-contact. Some people with celiac disease can have an immune reaction to the avenin in oats (a protein similar to gluten) and should avoid all oats, even those labeled gluten-free. If you can tolerate oats, make sure they are labeled gluten-free.

- **Soups and sauces:** Many soups and sauces contain gluten, as wheat is used by many companies as a thickening or flavoring agent. Make sure to read the label of pre-prepared, dry or canned soup and sauce, especially those that are cream based.
- **Salad dressings and marinades:** Salad dressings and marinades may contain thickeners or other gluten ingredients. Read the ingredient list and ideally look for one labeled “gluten-free.”
- **Cookies, crackers and snack bars:** Most common snack foods are made with a wheat-containing flour. Look for those labeled as “gluten-free” or check the ingredients to ensure you’re getting one without gluten ingredients.
- **Produce:** Fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables are naturally gluten-free. You will need to read the label on any processed fruits and vegetables as well as dried fruit, pre-prepared smoothies and packaged frozen potatoes to ensure they are gluten-free.
- **Beverages:** Most juices, sodas and sports drinks are gluten-free.

Remember that “wheat-free” does not necessarily mean “gluten-free.” It is important to read labels to ensure the product is gluten-free.

*Content adapted from Gluten-Free Foods | Celiac Disease Foundation*