

How to embrace gluten-free living



Welcome to the world of gluten-free living. Your new diet will help you stay healthy for the rest of your life. Starting out on the right foot can put you on the path to loving the GF life instead of merely living it. Here's how to hit the GF ground running!

Understand the bottom line

You need to avoid wheat, rye, barley, malt, and possibly oats (see below). Wheat comes in many forms – wheat, flour, cake flour, wheat starch, modified wheat starch, hydrolyzed wheat protein and pregelatinized wheat starch, as well as under many names, bran, bulgur, couscous, durum, einkorn, emmer, farina faro, graham, kamut, matzo, mir, orzo, panko, seitan, semolina, spelt, triticale (a hybrid of wheat and rye) and udon. *Be especially careful about spelt. Regardless of what you might read elsewhere, it is not safe for those who follow a GF diet.*

A growing number of foods are labeled gluten free, which makes it easier to find products that don't contain wheat, barley or rye. But labels rarely say a product contains gluten. Instead, you will need to look for sources of gluten, which are wheat, barley, rye and in some cases oats. In fact, the best way to approach the GF diet is to think in terms of avoiding wheat, rye and barley, not in terms of avoiding categories of food like soups or salad dressings or seasonings. That way you will be able to keep your focus where it needs to be.

Helpful tips

Wheat is easy to avoid. The Food Allergen

Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA), in effect since 2004, says when any of the top eight allergens (includes wheat) are in a food regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), they have to be indicated on the label.



The FDA regulates all packaged food except meat, eggs and poultry, which are regulated by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Although the USDA does not follow the same allergen labeling laws as the FDA, plain meat, eggs and poultry are naturally gluten free. And in most cases, when these products are processed, companies voluntarily label allergens. *That means you can feel a level of confidence that items regulated by the USDA are as well labeled as those regulated to the FDA.*

If you don't see the word "wheat" in the ingredients list or in a "contains" statement below the list, then it's not in the item. But when you do read "wheat" on a food label, the item is usually not safe. There are a few exceptions. Buckwheat, which is not related to wheat, is safe. (However, buckwheat pancake mix, may not be safe because it sometimes contains wheat flour) So are maltodextrin, glucose syrup and citric acid

labeled as being made with wheat. These ingredients have been so highly processed, they don't contain any harmful gluten protein.

These two examples illustrate why the gluten-free diet, while relatively simple, also has some complications. Buckwheat is safe by itself. Like anything else, it is not safe when mixed with wheat – and it frequently is. Wheat is not safe, but in the limited instances when the harmful protein is processed out of an ingredient, as it is when maltodextrin, glucose syrup and citric acid are produced, no gluten remains. So the resulting ingredient is safe. There is a learning curve when you go gluten free, but at the beginning, you are better off getting the bottom-line details set in your mind. Later you can work on all the nuances.

You will discover wheat in many of the foods you ate before going gluten free. Don't despair. The process of replacing them with tasty, healthful alternatives is not that difficult. And remember this comforting reality: Wheat will not be hidden in your food. You may discover that wheat is found in some surprising places, but it will not be hidden.

Rye is not covered by FALCPA, but it is easy to avoid. Rye is not found in many foods, which are almost always clearly labeled as rye bread or rye flavoring. There are very few subingredients derived from rye. Despite the lack of mandatory labeling, we do not know of a single instance of rye ever being hidden in a food.

Barley is not covered by FALCPA and is found in more foods than rye. But if you think

of **barley** and **malt** as meaning the same thing, then you shouldn't have any problems. Here are some of the words and phrases you might see: barley, barley malt, barley extract, barley syrup, malt, malt extract, malt flavoring.

Barley is also a main ingredient in beer, so the only kinds you can drink are those specifically labeled gluten free. Malt beverages, including most wine coolers, also contain barley. (But wine, which is made from grapes, and all distilled alcohols are gluten free.)

Oats fall into a separate category. Solid research has shown that some specially grown oats are safe for those who follow a gluten-free diet, but there are additional things to consider:

- **Contamination:** Oats are easily contaminated with gluten. So you will need to select oats that have been labeled as *gluten free*.
- **Fiber content:** Oats are high in fiber and consuming too much fiber if your body is not used to it can lead to gastrointestinal difficulty. Add oats to your gluten-free diet gradually to permit your body to get used to the fiber.
- **Amount:** Experts recommend adults following a GF diet eat only three-quarters of a cup of oats per day and children consume only one-half cup. They also recommend that those newly diagnosed with celiac disease wait until their blood antibody levels return to normal and they are symptom free before trying oats.



- **The Wild Card:** Some who follow a gluten-free diet can't tolerably consume pure oats. If they don't agree with you, then don't eat oats.

Points to remember

Some safe grains, like corn, have a *gluten component*, but it does not contain the protein harmful to those who are gluten free. You might be confused if you read *corn gluten* on an ingredients list (not often but sometimes), but it is safe.

You may read warnings about *hydrolyzed vegetable protein (HVP)* or *hydrolyzed plant protein (HPP)*, but you won't find these unidentified names on an ingredients list. In both cases, the ingredient could be derived from wheat. But more than 20 years ago, the FDA told processors they had to identify the "vegetable" or "plant" in an HVP or HPP. In addition, FALCPA says wheat in any form must be identified on a food label. That means you will read hydrolyzed wheat (or some other vegetable or plant) protein and know immediately whether or not the item is safe.

Malt is usually made from barley, but it can be made from corn. However, this happens so infrequently, it seems easiest to avoid malt whenever you see it on an ingredients list.

Pharmaceuticals are a concern and you will want to consider them as you adopt a gluten-free life. But keep them in perspective. Some things to consider:

- Most pharmaceuticals are gluten free. We have found only a very small percentage contain gluten.
- Pharmaceuticals are small to begin with and often contain several ingredients – some active (which will be gluten free) and some fillers (which have a very slight risk of containing gluten).
- You may take a drug for a limited amount of time...or every day, which affects the magnitude of the risk. Check glutenfreedrugs.com for a list of gluten-free pharmaceuticals or call the drug manufacturer.
- Never let concern about gluten in pharmaceuticals stop you from taking a life-saving drug in an emergency situation. That's not to say you should consume gluten, but to suggest that it is as important to keep your worry about gluten in healthy perspective as it is to avoid gluten.

Starch can be confusing. These are the facts: The words "starch" or "food starch" on a food label refer to cornstarch, so they are safe. Modified food starch is safe as long as the word wheat does not appear on the food label. That's because FALCPA says wheat must be labeled on foods regulated by the FDA. Therefore, processors who use modified wheat starch in a product need to label it precisely as "modified wheat starch" or add "contains wheat" after the ingredients list. Barley and rye are rarely if ever found in starch form.



Spices and seasonings also can be confusing. Plain spices are, by definition, safe. You might read that some are extended with flour but that is a myth. Seasonings can be anything and could contain gluten. Your best protection is to always read the label

Get on with it

Easy gluten-free living comes from knowing what you need to worry about and not worrying about what you don't need to worry about, especially when you are just learning the diet. So it's important to get your facts straight. Avoid pointless concern about very minor items – lipstick for example – that have little or no real place on your list of worries about what is gluten free.

At this point, think in terms of categories. The main categories to be concerned about are:

All baked goods including bread in all forms (rolls, wraps, etc.), cakes, cookies, pies, as well as things that have a crust, like pizza, and mainstream pretzels.

Pasta and noodles in all of their varieties

Many if not most mainstream cereals

One of your first jobs is to find gluten-free substitutes for these items, and it won't be difficult. Today, gluten-free baked goods are

usually available in your supermarket and neighborhood shops as well as on the Internet. You can find almost anything in a gluten-free version including wraps, matzos and pita bread. You can buy mixes to easily make gluten-free bread, cake and cookies. If you like baking, you can buy your own GF ingredients and bake from scratch. Gluten-free pasta and noodles are also easily available. They are usually made from rice, corn, buckwheat or quinoa. The initial switch from wheat pasta to GF pasta may seem startling, but in this case, familiarity soon breeds contentment. You'll be amazed at how quickly your tastes will adjust. It may take some experimentation to find types and brands of food you like, so be open to trying new things.

The cereal aisle in the supermarket is a challenge and you will still find many products that are off limits. But in response to the rising number of GF consumers, major food companies have been reformulating some of their mainstream cereals to be gluten free, often by replacing barley malt with a safe substitute and using procedures to guard against contamination from gluten-containing ingredients in the same facility. In virtually all cases, the switch to GF is indicated in big letters on the package.

Hot GF cereal was always easily available. Corn, rice, quinoa, buckwheat and amaranth, all GF grains, are available as a hot cereal. Just read the label carefully to make sure they do not include any gluten-containing ingredients.

Outside of those three categories, you'll find a long list of safe foods you can eat on the



gluten-free diet. The following grains and grain-like substitutes are safe:

Corn in all forms (corn flour, corn meal, grits, etc.). Rice in all forms (white, brown, basmati and enriched rice). Also amaranth, buckwheat (kasha), Montina, millet, quinoa, tef, sorghum and soy. Many of the safe foods are items you are used to eating. All of the following are gluten free (if any are packaged, read the label carefully):



- Plain, fresh vegetables and fruits (fresh, frozen and canned as well as plain juices made from them), meat, poultry, fish, seafood, and eggs.
- Plain nuts, beans, legumes and the flours made from them.
- Most dairy products including milk, butter, margarine, real cheese (meaning simple cheeses made with enzymes, not processed cheeses that contain a lengthy list of ingredients), plain yogurt and most flavored yogurts (avoid those with add-ins like crunchies and granola) and plain ice cream without gluten-containing add-ins.
- Oils

Processed Foods

Supermarkets are filled with processed foods and they can be a challenge when you are learning to follow the gluten-free diet. But there are ways to cut the challenge down to size. Your first supermarket trips after going gluten free may be frustrating. Start with labels that contain few ingredients and are reasonably likely to be gluten free (canned fruits and vegetables, for example). Remember that things get better quickly. Here are some tips to help you cope.

- Stick to the outside aisles of the supermarket. That's where you'll probably find fresh produce, plain meat, poultry and fish, and dairy items. All these are highly likely to be gluten free.
- Find out whether the store has a gluten-free section. Some

supermarkets group gluten-free items; others spread them throughout the store.

- Keep your mind focused on the three categories that will almost definitely contain gluten -- baked food, pasta and cereal -- and the many categories that are highly likely to be gluten free -- produce, dairy items and meat, fish and poultry, for example.
- In the beginning, stay away from high-risk categories like soup or flavored rice mixes. Later when you know more about the GF diet and feel more confident about shopping, you can face these challenges.

- Consider the first few supermarket trips a success if you come away with plenty of safe foods (produce, meat, fish, eggs, etc.) and a few breakfast, lunch and dinner items. And because this is the real world and we all need rewards, seek out at least one safe snack!

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Don't forget nutrition

It is very easy when going gluten free to forget about good nutrition and to fall into the trap of thinking a gluten-free food is fine even if it lacks nutritional value. But at some point, you will come face to face with the nutritional content of your gluten-free diet and have to face its overall value to your health.

Your first instinct might be to load up on gluten-free versions of all the treats that you can't have -- cookies, cakes, muffins, doughnuts and pizza. But the reality is a healthy gluten-free diet is based on the same principles as any other nutritious eating plan. You should eat mostly whole grains, fresh fruits and vegetables, low fat meat and fish. Treats should be just that.

The gluten-free diet is certainly life changing, but when you have celiac disease or gluten intolerance most of the change will eventually be for the better. It might be hard to believe that in the beginning, but many people have been where you are now and come back to say they embrace gluten-free living. We feel confident in saying you will join them soon.