

## Wheat and gluten-free on the same label

**Q. I recently noticed that Benefiber contains wheat dextrin. Yet the label states that there are less than 10 ppm gluten in the container. My husband has been using Benefiber for five years. Is wheat dextrin considered safe?**

**A.** It may seem contradictory to find wheat dextrin as an ingredient in Benefiber when it is also labeled gluten free. But here is the reasoning behind the gluten-free claim.

The Benefiber website says the dextrin in Benefiber powder and caplets contains less than 10 parts per million (ppm) of gluten, an amount described as a "trace." Currently in the US there is no law that governs how much gluten is allowed in a product labeled "gluten free."

The Food and Drug Administration is working on a law that proposes to define "gluten free" as anything with less than 20 ppm of gluten. The law will cover packaged food and food supplements regulated by the FDA. Under that definition, Benefiber would be considered gluten free.

Benefiber only recently started using wheat dextrin instead of hydrolyzed guar gum. The change was made to increase the amount of fiber. For most of the five years your husband took Benefiber, it contained the guar gum, which is gluten free.

Benefiber did jump the gun a little in already labeling a product that contains wheat as being gluten free. Without any definition for gluten free, the general rule has always been that a product could not be gluten free if it listed wheat as an ingredient.

But the FDA said that since its proposed new rule with the 20 ppm cutoff has been made public, and since there are no federal regulations for gluten free, it would be unlikely to challenge a label like the one on Benefiber.

The FDA did caution manufacturers about labeling products "gluten-free" and also stating that they contain some amount of gluten because the label would be confusing to consumers at this point.

Julie Masow, a spokesperson for Novartis, which makes Benefiber, noted the lack of federal regulations and said the label met an FDA standard of being truthful and not misleading.

She also said the wheat dextrin is not wheat but a starch derived from wheat.

**Q. I am extremely allergic to buckwheat. Can you tell me if US nutrition labeling guidelines require that buckwheat be included on food labels, regardless of the amount, and also if there are any other names under which it might be listed.**

**A.** All food in the US has to be labeled to accurately reflect the ingredients it contains. So the label on a product that contains buckwheat should list buckwheat, buckwheat groats or kasha, another name for buckwheat.

Sometimes one ingredient is used to make another and it might be hard to know that by reading the label. The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act requires that the top eight allergens always be listed on the label even when they are used to make another ingredient. Buckwheat is not one of the top eight allergens, but it is generally not used to make other ingredients, so you should not have to worry about that possibility too much.

Cliff Orr, vice president of Birkett Mills, the number one producer of buckwheat in the world, said he is not aware of any ingredients made from buckwheat or any cases where buckwheat would be in a product, but not on the label.

A very small amount of buckwheat that might be in a food due to cross-contamination, however, would not have to be labeled. There are currently no regulations that require labeling of ingredients that accidentally get into food through cross-contamination. Some companies voluntarily label the potential for cross-contamination, but usually only for the top eight allergens. Also, food makers are expected to follow good manufacturing procedures to reduce cross-contamination as much as possible.

Buckwheat is gluten free and is safe for those who have celiac disease. An allergy to buckwheat, which is a fruit and can produce an allergic reaction similar to an allergy to strawberries, is a separate matter.

Orr said those who are allergic to buckwheat should realize that use of buckwheat is growing as food companies produce more multi-grain breads, cereals and snack foods, but buckwheat would be listed as an ingredient on the labels. In general, these products are not gluten free because they contain wheat, barley, rye or oats contaminated by wheat.

**Q. Is miso gluten free?**

**A.** Miso, a Japanese condiment, is a fermented paste made from beans and grain.

The beans used include soybeans, chickpeas, and adzuki beans, all of which are gluten free. Grains used include rice, millet, amaranth and quinoa, which are gluten free and wheat, barley and rye, which are not.

You can sometimes tell if a miso contains gluten by its name. For example, mugi miso always contains barley and tsubi miso always contains wheat and barley. Some brands identify the bean or the grain in the name of the miso, for example barley miso or brown rice miso.

Eden Foods' Gen Mi Brown Rice Miso and Shiro Miso do not contain any ingredients with gluten. South River Miso's adzuki bean, chick pea, golden millet, garlic red pepper and hearty brown rice misos contain only gluten-free ingredients. The company notes that these flavors are made on the same equipment as the barley miso.

Miso is a main ingredient in miso soup. The soup would not be gluten free if the miso contains gluten. Edward & Sons has four flavors of instant miso soup that are GF: original golden vegetable, traditional with tofu, reduced sodium and Japanese restaurant style.

*Send your questions to  
amy@glutenfreeliving.com*