

Nutrition for Eating Gluten Free

Walking through the supermarket aisles, you may have noticed an increasing number of products labeled “gluten-free.” So what is gluten and why would you want to eliminate it from your diet?

Gluten is a protein that is found in wheat, barley, and rye. Oats are naturally gluten-free; however, can be contaminated with gluten if near wheat, barley, or rye when grown and harvested. Many types of pasta, breads, cereals and other grain based foods contain gluten. For the general population, foods with gluten are well tolerated and can be included as part of a healthy diet. For those with Celiac Disease however, following a gluten-free diet is a must.

Celiac Disease is a condition in which eating foods with gluten triggers an immune response in the body that causes damage to the lining of the small intestines. This damage affects the ability to properly absorb important nutrients from food, which can lead to malnutrition. Celiac disease can develop at any age and the exact cause is unknown. There is no cure, however following a life-long gluten-free diet will allow the intestines to heal and prevent further damage. Symptoms of Celiac disease may include weakness, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, bloating, weight loss or others.

In addition to Celiac disease, there is evidence that some people may experience gluten intolerance or sensitivity. There is currently no test to diagnose this condition and reported symptoms vary widely. Those who suspect they are sensitive to gluten may benefit from following a gluten-free diet, though unlike those with Celiac disease, those with gluten sensitivity may be able to tolerate some gluten containing foods.

To follow a gluten-free diet follow these tips:

- Unseasoned fruits and vegetables, meats, and natural dairy are naturally gluten-free!
- Today more gluten-free food products are available than ever before. Choose gluten-free grains and other grain-based foods, such as crackers and pancake mix, that do not contain gluten. Amaranth, arrowroot, beans, buckwheat, corn, garfava, millet, nut flours, potato, quinoa, rice, sorghum, soy, tapioca and tef are all gluten-free options.
- Read food labels carefully. Many commercially prepared foods have gluten-containing ingredients. Gluten is one of the most common allergens so it has to be declared on the Nutrition Facts Panel if in a food. Look under the ingredient list for “Contains: Wheat or Gluten” and avoid if containing gluten.
- Eating away from home? Pack gluten-free foods. Read restaurant menus carefully, and ask questions. If you’re a guest in someone’s home, tell them about your special food needs in advance, and offer to bring food.

For further questions and gluten-free recommendations, please consult a registered dietitian.

This medical and/or nutritional information is not intended to be a substitute for individual advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition.