

Gluten-Free

Discover what a gluten-free diet is, who needs to follow one, and learn about ways to simplify gluten-free shopping!

The prevalence of celiac disease and gluten intolerances has increased by more than a fourfold in the past 50 years. Many cases remain undiagnosed, and following a strict gluten-free diet is the only treatment.

Celiac disease is an autoimmune reaction that causes damage to the intestinal tract when gluten is ingested. This will cause damage to the small intestine, which can result in malabsorption of essential nutrients. Over long periods of time this can have a serious impact on the health of an individual. Gluten sensitivities (or intolerances) are different from Celiac disease because the ingestion of gluten doesn't cause an autoimmune reaction. Gluten sensitivities typically cause painful abdominal symptoms and the removal of gluten from the diet will prevent these uncomfortable symptoms.

What is gluten? Gluten is a protein fraction found in wheat, barley, rye, spelt and kamut. In the past, the protein found in oats was also included in this list. It is becoming more clear that oats are more closely related to rice, and typically do not irritate those with gluten allergies. However; oats are commonly packaged in facilities that also produce wheat-containing items! Therefore it is best to purchase oats that are certified gluten-free!

Learning how to follow a gluten-free diet can be challenging- especially at first! Gluten is ubiquitous! Most commonly, you will find gluten in bread, pastas, cereals, cakes and other wheat, rye or barley containing products. Gluten is also hidden in many less suspicious foods and is also commonly used as 'filler'. A short list includes: salad dressings, soy sauce, gravies, deli meats, dairy substitutes, marinades, sausages, and malted drinks. In order to follow a gluten-free diet, you must become a label-reading expert!

If you do not follow a gluten-free diet properly, symptoms will not be alleviated. It is important to make sure your diet is still well balanced. Below are some helpful shopping tips:

Fresh and simple! Fruits and vegetables, fresh meat, poultry, seafood, dairy, eggs, legumes, nuts and tofu are all gluten free! The easiest way to follow a gluten-free diet is by sticking to the basics. Avoid buying pre-packaged or artificially flavoured foods.

Spice it up! Individually packaged spices and herbs do not contain flour and are gluten-free. Be careful because some spice mixtures do contain flour, which is added to prevent clumping. Read carefully, and use herbs to add excitement and flavour to your cooking!

Beans beans beans! Most brands of plain canned beans are gluten-free. Incorporating beans into your diet will help you increase your daily fibre intake.

Experiment with grains. The most challenging part for most individuals is finding substitutions for gluten-containing grains. You don't need to say good-bye to bread and pasta! There are many gluten-free grains available. Give them all a try and experiment baking and making your own bread! Some of these varieties include:

	Calories	Protein (g)	Carbs (g)	Fibre (g)
Amaranth ½	120	3.8	18.7	2.1

cup				
Buckwheat ½ cup	61	2.3	13	2
Ground flax seeds ½ cup	300	14	22.6	18.6
Quinoa ½ cup	120	4.4	21	3
Brown rice	111	2.6	23	1.8

Specialty products. A lot of certified gluten-free foods are expensive. It is not necessary to purchase these special products, although sometimes convenience snacks come in handy. Gluten-free protein bars are great easy snack ideas. Check out The Simply Bar- it's low in calories, high in protein, AND gluten-free!

Eating out. Whether you are going to a friend's house for dinner, or to your favourite restaurant, eating out is always challenging. If you are lucky, some restaurants have gluten-free menu items. Otherwise ask a lot of clear questions, because often staff members are not 100% sure if a menu item is gluten-free. It is always best to stick with plain foods.

Cross-contamination. It is important to gluten-proof your kitchen. Go through your cupboards and determine which food items contain gluten, and need to be avoided. Clearly label gluten-free foods. Make sure appliances and counters are cleaned before food preparation.

Advocate! If in doubt, do your own research. Talk to employees at your local food store or directly contact food manufacturers by calling the 1-800 number provided on the back of a product.

There are a lot of great gluten-free cookbooks and resources available! Reach out to your local Celiac Association, and be open about your allergy. Have fun with a gluten-free diet and continue to do ongoing research!

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www.celiac.ca

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