



Gluten-free diet

By Mayo Clinic staff

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Definition

A gluten-free diet is a diet that excludes the protein gluten. Gluten is found in grains such as wheat, barley and rye.

A gluten-free diet is used to treat celiac disease. Gluten causes inflammation in the small intestines of people with celiac disease. Eating a gluten-free diet helps people with celiac disease control their signs and symptoms and prevent complications.

Initially, following a gluten-free diet may be frustrating. But with time, patience and creativity, you'll find there are many foods that you can eat and enjoy while observing a gluten-free diet.

Purpose

The gluten-free diet is a treatment for celiac disease.

Diet details

Always avoid

In order to avoid eating gluten, avoid food and drinks containing:

- Barley
- Bulgur
- Durham
- Farina
- Graham flour
- Kamut

- Matzo meal
- Rye
- Semolina
- Spelt (a form of wheat)
- Triticale
- Wheat

Avoid unless labeled 'gluten free'

Avoid these foods unless they're labeled as gluten free or made with corn, rice, soy or other gluten-free grain. Also check the label to see that they're processed in a facility that is free of wheat or other contaminating products:

- Beers
- Breads
- Candies
- Cakes and pies
- Cereals
- Cookies
- Crackers
- Croutons
- Gravies
- Imitation meats or seafood
- Oats
- Pastas
- Processed luncheon meats
- Salad dressings
- Sauces (including soy sauce)
- Self-basting poultry
- Soups

Certain grains, such as oats, can be contaminated with wheat during growing and processing stages of production. It's not clear whether oats are harmful for most people with celiac disease, but doctors generally recommend avoiding oats

unless they are specifically labeled gluten free. The question of whether people eating a gluten-free diet can consume pure oat products remains a subject of scientific debate.

Many other products that you eat or that could come in contact with your mouth may contain gluten. These include:

- Food additives, such as malt flavoring, modified food starch and others
- Lipstick and lip balms
- Medications and vitamins that use gluten as a binding agent
- Play dough
- Toothpaste

Cross-contamination also may occur anywhere ingredients come together, such as on a cutting board or a grill surface. You may be exposed to gluten by using the same utensils as others, such as a bread knife, or by sharing the same condiment containers — the condiment bottle may touch the bun, or a knife with bread crumbs may contaminate a margarine stick or mayonnaise jar.

Allowed foods

There are still many basic foods allowed in a gluten-free diet. With all foods, check to see that each is labeled gluten free or call the manufacturer to double-check.

Grains and starches allowed in a gluten-free diet include:

- Amaranth
- Arrowroot
- Buckwheat
- Corn
- Cornmeal
- Gluten-free flours (rice, soy, corn, potato, bean)
- Hominy grits
- Polenta
- Pure corn tortillas
- Quinoa
- Rice

- Tapioca

Check the label when buying amaranth, buckwheat and quinoa. These can be contaminated with gluten during processing.

Other gluten-free foods include:

- Fresh meats, fish and poultry (not breaded, batter-coated or marinated)
- Fruits
- Most dairy products
- Potatoes
- Rice
- Vegetables
- Wine and distilled liquors, ciders and spirits

An increasing number of gluten-free products, such as bread and pasta, are becoming available. If you can't find them in your area, check with a celiac support group or on the Web. Gluten-free substitutes are available for many gluten-containing foods, from brownies to beer. Many specialty grocery stores sell gluten-free foods.

Results

People with celiac disease who eat a gluten-free diet experience fewer symptoms and complications of the disease. People with celiac disease must eat a strictly gluten-free diet and must remain on the diet for the remainder of their lives.

In some severe cases, a gluten-free diet alone can't stop signs and symptoms of celiac disease. In these cases, doctors might prescribe medications to suppress the immune system.

Risks

Not eating enough vitamins

People who follow a gluten-free diet may have low levels of certain vitamins and nutrients in their diets. Many grains are enriched with vitamins. Avoiding grains with a gluten-free diet may mean eating fewer of these enriched products. Ask your dietitian to review your diet to see that you're getting enough:

- Iron
- Calcium
- Fiber

- Thiamin
- Riboflavin
- Niacin
- Folate

Not sticking to the gluten-free diet

If you accidentally eat a product that contains gluten, you may experience abdominal pain and diarrhea. Some people experience no signs or symptoms after eating gluten, but this doesn't mean it's not damaging their small intestines. Even trace amounts of gluten in your diet may be damaging, whether or not they cause signs or symptoms.

References

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