

Patient education: Gluten-free diet (The Basics)

[Written by the doctors and editors at UpToDate](#)

What is a gluten-free diet? — A gluten-free diet is a diet that doesn't contain any gluten. Gluten is a protein that is found in wheat, rye, barley, and (sometimes) oats. Many foods, such as breads, pasta, pizza, cereals, and crackers, have gluten in them. People who are on a gluten-free diet should not eat any foods with gluten.

Who should be on a gluten-free diet? — People with a condition called celiac disease should be on a gluten-free diet. Celiac disease is a condition that affects the body's ability to break down certain foods. People with celiac disease get sick if they eat foods with gluten. They need to be on a strict gluten-free diet for their whole life.

If you think you have celiac disease, don't start a gluten-free diet until after you are tested for the disease. That's because what you eat can affect your test results.

More and more, though, people without celiac disease are eating a gluten-free diet. They might have heard that this diet can help them lose weight or feel better. It's true that a gluten-free diet can be healthy. But it also sometimes keeps people from getting all the nutrition they need. If you are thinking about being on a gluten-free diet, ask your doctor or nurse if it's a good choice for you.

How do I get started? — To get started, you will work with a dietitian (food expert) or other professional who has experience with a gluten-free diet. He or she will:

- Teach you which foods are fine to eat and which foods you should avoid
- Help you plan balanced meals so that you get the nutrition you need
- Give you gluten-free recipes
- Help you find gluten-free substitutes for your favorite foods (such as pasta or cookies)

You can get advice and help from other people, too. Ask your doctor or nurse if there is a local support group for people with celiac disease. Or you can look at websites, such as www.celiac.org, www.celiac.com, and www.csaceliacs.org.

It can be hard to learn how to manage a gluten-free diet, especially at first. But it usually gets easier with practice and over time.

Which foods can I eat? — Foods that are gluten free and fine to eat include the following ([table 1](#)):

- Rice, corn, potatoes, quinoa, millet, buckwheat, and soybeans
- Special flours, pasta, and other products made from these foods and labeled "gluten free"
- Fruits and vegetables
- Meat and eggs
- Wine and distilled alcoholic drinks, such as rum, tequila, vodka, and whiskey

Milk, cheese, and other dairy foods are also gluten free. But many people with celiac disease have trouble digesting these foods, especially at first. Doctors usually recommend that people with celiac disease avoid eating dairy products, at least for a short time, while their intestines are healing.

Which foods should I not eat? — You need to avoid all foods made from or with wheat, rye, and barley ([table 2](#)). Ask your doctor or dietitian if you can eat oats.

Many types of foods contain or might contain gluten, such as:

- Flour, breads, crackers, muffins, and baking mixes
- Pasta, pastries, and cereals
- Some sauces, spreads, spices, condiments, and salad dressings
- Processed meats and meat substitutes (like vegetarian burgers)
- Beers, ales, lagers, and malt vinegars

To know exactly which foods you can eat, you will have to read ingredient labels. Foods that are labeled "gluten free" or say they are made or processed in a "gluten-free facility" are fine to eat. Foods that contain wheat are **not** fine to eat. If you are unsure whether a food is gluten free, call the company. Their phone number should be on the package.

Some medicines (both prescription and over-the-counter) and vitamin supplements contain a small amount of gluten. But you can still take most types of pills if you have celiac disease. Check with your doctor or nurse if you are not sure.

Will I need to take vitamins? — You might. Celiac disease can keep your digestive system from normally absorbing the nutrients in foods. To get all the nutrients you need, your doctor or nurse might recommend that you take a daily vitamin.

Can I eat out? — Yes. Many restaurants now have gluten-free menus or foods. But always let the restaurant know you can't have gluten. That way, they can be extra careful when they cook your food.

What if my child is on a gluten-free diet? — If your child is on a gluten-free diet, let his or her caregivers, teachers, and school know. Tell them which foods your child can and can't eat. If your child goes to school, you might want to leave a gluten-free treat with the nurse or teacher. That way, your child will have a safe treat when the class has a party.

More on this topic

[Patient education: Celiac disease \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Vitamin supplements \(The Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Celiac disease in adults \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

[Patient education: Celiac disease in children \(Beyond the Basics\)](#)

All topics are updated as new evidence becomes available and our [peer review process](#) is complete.

This topic retrieved from UpToDate on: Feb 26, 2017.

The content on the UpToDate website is not intended nor recommended as a substitute for medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your own physician or other qualified health care professional regarding any medical questions or conditions. The use of UpToDate content is governed by the [UpToDate Terms of Use](#). ©2017 UpToDate, Inc. All rights reserved.

Topic 86971 Version 4.0

GRAPHICS

Gluten-free foods

Amaranth	Legumes	Sorghum (milo)
Arrowroot	Millet	Soy
Beans/bean flours (garfava, etc)	Nuts/nut flours	Tapioca, tapioca starch
Buckwheat	Potato, potato starch, potato flour	Teff
Cassava	Quinoa	Wild rice
Corn	Rice	Yucca
Flax	Sago	
Job's tears	Seeds	

The foods listed above are naturally gluten-free. However, naturally gluten-free grains, flours, nuts, seeds, and products made from them may be contaminated with wheat, barley, and/or rye. Whenever possible, choose labeled gluten-free versions of these products.

Reproduced with permission from: Dennis M, Case S. Going gluten-free: a primer for clinicians. Pract Gastroenterol 2004; 28:86.

Graphic 54353 Version 7.0

Foods that contain gluten

Foods that definitely contain gluten:

Wheat (einkorn, durum, faro, graham, kamut, semolina, spelt)

Rye

Barley

Malt, malt flavoring, malt extract derived from barley

Malt vinegar

Triticale

Beers, ales and lagers*

Breading, bread crumbs, and coating mixes*

Croutons*

Matzo and matzo meal*

Pasta*

Stuffing (for poultry)*

Foods that might contain gluten:

Brewer's yeast

Broth, bouillon, or soup stock

Brown rice syrup

Cake frosting

Candy and licorice

Communion wafers

Condiments

Dates (if rolled in oat flour)

Drink mixes

Energy bars

Flavored teas and coffees

Flavored spirits (such as raspberry vodka)

Flour or cereal products

Imitation products, like bacon or seafood

Medicines (both over-the-counter and prescription, including probiotics)

Oats (unless they are labeled "gluten free")

Processed lunch meats

Rice pilaf and other packaged rice mixtures

Salad dressing

Sauces, gravies, marinades, and thickeners

Seasonings, spices, and smoke flavoring

Seasoned chips, nuts, and seeds

Self-basting poultry

Soy sauce

Vitamins and herbal supplements

Play products for children:

Play-dough
Paper maché
Glue
Some other art supplies
Some of these play products are made from flour or contain gluten. Children with celiac disease can play with these products, but they should wash their hands after playing.

For the foods that might contain gluten, it depends on their ingredients and where they were made. To know for sure, you will need to check the ingredient label.

* These products usually contain gluten, unless specially labeled "gluten-free."

Graphic 86922 Version 5.0