

The Gluten-Free Diet and Gluten Related Disorders: Cross-Contamination

A strict gluten-free diet (GFD) is the only effective treatment for celiac disease (CD) and dermatitis herpetiformis (DH) that requires the lifelong elimination of all foods and ingredients containing wheat, barley, rye, related cereals grains and regular oats (not labelled “gluten free”).

In managing CD or DH with the strict GFD, you must also avoid gluten cross-contamination (also known as gluten cross-contact). Cross-contamination is gluten transferred from a gluten-containing food or surface to a gluten-free (GF) food or surface. This is important both at home and away from home. Even small amounts of gluten can be harmful to those with CD or DH. Below are some practical tips for preventing gluten cross-contamination.

At Home

- Store GF foods separate from foods that contain gluten.
- Store GF foods/items on shelves above gluten-containing items.
- Wash hands between handling gluten-containing and GF foods.
- Wash hands and toys that have been contaminated with gluten.
- Wash the counters carefully before preparing a GF meal.
- Use separate kitchen sponges and scrub/scour pads.
- Clean all pots, pans, utensils and counter tops with soap between uses.
- Clean dishwasher filter regularly.
- Use a separate and dedicated toaster for GF products.
- Use a toaster bag for GF products in a shared toaster.
- Clean rack in toaster oven before toasting/heating GF items.
- Keep GF items covered when using the microwave.
- Keep GF items covered when using the convection setting in the oven.
- Place GF items on foil if using a shared BBQ grill.
- Use plastic or metal baking utensils and cutting boards instead of wooden ones because gluten can adhere (stick) in wooden surfaces and cannot be washed off.

- Use separate dedicated pasta colander, muffin tins, bread machines, sifter, measuring utensils and waffle iron for GF items.
- Use condiments from a squeeze bottle when available or have separate containers for those used with GF products (for example, peanut butter, jam, butter or margarine dish).

Outside of the Home

You have no control over your environment when you and your family are outside your home.

- Keep GF foods separate from foods that contain gluten. For example do not eat GF foods that are on the same plate as gluten-containing foods e.g. a cheese and cracker tray.
- Avoid buffets as foods may become contaminated with gluten when customers use the same serving utensils between dishes.
- Ask to be served first when eating at friends or family who prepare GF food.
- Bring your own GF dish(es) to share.

Before going out to eat

- Call the restaurant before going out to eat to ask if they have a GF menu or can adapt menu items to be GF.
- Visit the restaurant's website to check the menu, list of ingredients and gluten and/or allergy warnings.
- Select a restaurant where you can clearly communicate your GF needs e.g. language, noise level.
- Try to go to restaurants during hours when it is less busy.
- When in doubt, pack GF breads, crackers and/or favourite condiments.

At the restaurant

- Tell your server that you require a strict GFD for the treatment of CD or DH.
- Ask the server to point out GF items on the menu or ask if they have a separate GF menu.
- Ask questions about the ingredients, food preparation, and how staff handle cross-contamination.

- Be aware that some seasonings, salad dressings, sauces, marinades and soups may contain gluten.
- Avoid croutons, breadcrumbs, soy sauce and gravies that contain gluten.
- Avoid French fries and other GF foods if they have been cooked in oil where gluten-containing items (e.g. chicken fingers, onion rings, nachos, battered items, some hashbrowns) have been fried.
- Ask for pasta and rice to be cooked in clean water.
- Ask for eggs to be cooked on a separate pan.
- Check that pancake batter has not been added to omelettes and scrambled eggs.
- Ask that desserts (e.g. ice cream, sorbets) do not have wafers or cookies.

Grocery Shopping

- Always read product labels for any sources of gluten.
- Do not buy foods that have no nutrition or allergy information on the label. This may happen with foods imported from other countries.
- Avoid buying items from bulk bins as they are high risk for gluten cross-contamination.
 - Products in bulk bins can easily become contaminated by people using the scoops in more than one bin.
 - Some bins may have stored gluten-containing items and not thoroughly cleaned before GF items were placed in the same bin.
- Purchase naturally GF grains, flours, cereals, pulses (especially lentils) and flax and hemp seeds with labels that are clearly marked "gluten free."
 - Naturally GF grains are high risk for cross-contamination. This can occur during seeding, harvesting, storage, transportation, milling, or processing.
 - If it is not possible to purchase dried pulses with a GF claim it is recommended to place the pulses on a clean cookie sheet, visually inspect the pulse, and remove any foreign grain kernels. Then rinse well with water before cooking.



- It is recommended to purchase pulse-based products (e.g. flours, pastas, soups, stews) with a GF claim as it is not possible to visually inspect for foreign grain kernels in these products.
- Only purchase oats and oat-based products with a “gluten-free” claim.
- Choose packaged deli meats. At the deli counter GF meats are cut using the same slicer without cleaning between uses, which is a source of contamination.
- Contact food companies when in doubt about processing and gluten contamination.

At workplaces, schools, day cares or camps

- Ask about GF menu options. It is important to check directly with the food provider about potential sources of gluten contamination.
 - Opt out of school meal plans if institutions are unable to provide assurance that meals and snacks are strictly GF.
 - Supply GF food options when in doubt about food safety for the strict GFD.
- Avoid trading food with other students, friends or co-workers.

Additional Resources

Celiac Canada

1-800-363-7296

<https://www.celiac.ca/>

Celiac Canada

Shared kitchen video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BatYIJTkjgU>



Notes

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