

What can I eat tonight?

How to get through your first few gluten-free days
without feeling totally overwhelmed



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What Can I Eat Tonight?

Have you heard this?

“You have celiac disease. You need to stop eating wheat, rye, and barley in all forms starting today and for the rest of your life. Good luck and take care.”

or

“I want you to go on a gluten-free diet. That means no wheat, rye or barley. I’ll refer you to a dietitian; you should have an appointment in about 2 weeks”.

If you are lucky, your doctor handed you a sheaf of papers with a list of ingredients to avoid or to check, or maybe a long list of foods to avoid. If you are really lucky, they gave you the name and number of a support group in your area to call for help.

If you get a the name of a local support group contact, call them – local support groups are an awesome source of information about where to shop, what products to try and what ones to avoid, and which restaurants in your area are helpful for people who eat gluten free.

If you are unlucky, you were sent home wondering what is gluten anyway and will ever feel normal again. Here is some help.

You are not the only person who has felt this way

Feeling overwhelmed at the thought of totally changing your diet is perfectly normal. My goal is to help you figure out how to have a wonderful life, even without gluten.

Here are my three steps to getting started on a gluten free diet without getting overwhelmed by the details.

1. Start with foods that are naturally gluten free, foods that have never had any gluten in them.
2. Add some products that are specifically identified as gluten free.
3. Figure out what regular products are gluten free. You will be surprised how many products on your ordinary grocery shelf are OK for you to eat.

Step 1 - Start with foods that are naturally gluten free

Building your evening meal

Your first task is probably going to be figuring out what to eat for your evening meal. If you start with basic and unprocessed foods, you can fix something easy that tastes good.

Start with your meat or protein:

- chicken, pork, beef (including hamburger), turkey, etc.
- fish, seafood (not artificial crab)
- beans
- eggs
- tofu



Add some vegetables - your choice of almost any vegetable in any form:

- fresh
- frozen, as long as there are just vegetables listed on the package
- canned as long as there is no sauce or spice added
- salad made from greens and vegetables

Add a starch:

- potato, sweet potato, yams
- rice (regular or instant is OK, but not from a seasoned mix)
- corn tortilla or taco shell

And a beverage:

- coffee, tea
- milk, water, juice, pop or soda
- wine
- mixed drinks from spirits



If you would like some dessert, consider:

- fruit
- yogurt
- plain ice cream, ice milk, or frozen yogurt – vanilla, chocolate, strawberry, fruit flavored
- Jell-O
- pudding

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To cook and spice your meal, you can use most of the same ingredients you would normally use:

- cooking oil, butter, margarine
- onion, garlic, olives, and celery
- salt and pepper
- spices and herbs (pick single spices and herbs, not mixed spices or herbs or anything that uses the term “seasoning”)
- oil and vinegar salad dressing (other types may be GF, but the goal here is to keep it simple)
- cheese, including pre-grated
- ketchup (as long as malt vinegar or seasoning is not on the ingredient list)
- mustard (as long as malt vinegar or wheat flour is not on the ingredient list; mustard flour is OK)



Breakfast

For many people, breakfast is the hardest meal to figure out what to eat, especially if you grab a piece of toast or a bagel on the way out the door or are used to a bowl of cereal.

Breakfast supplies will be one of the first things you shop for in step 2, but for your first few days, you may have to alter your breakfast routine a bit.

There are lots of “breakfast” foods that are gluten free.

- fruit
- yogurt
- eggs
- cheese
- peanut butter
- juice, milk, coffee, tea



If you have some corn tortillas or taco shells in the house, you can wrap some of these ingredients up to take with you.

Bananas, apples, grapes and other fruit work for “grab and go” type breakfast eaters.

While it may seem strange, you can also eat leftovers from supper for breakfast. This is common in some parts of the world.

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Lunch

Lunch can be a challenge for people starting out gluten free because it is often eaten away from home. For the first few days, you may want to avoid eating in a restaurants, but here are some things you can carry from home.



- leftovers from last night's supper eaten cold or heated up in a microwave
- salad from mixed greens and various vegetables; add eggs, meat, beans or cheese for protein; many salad dressings are GF (as long as it doesn't include malt vinegar or wheat on the ingredient list)
- egg, chicken, or tuna salad wrapped in a corn tortilla, lettuce leaf, or dumped on top of salad greens
- veggies and dip made from sour cream and spices or hummus
- peanut butter in celery sticks
- hard boiled eggs
- fruit
- cheese, including cottage cheese



Snacks

- fruit
- raw vegetables and dip made from sour cream and spices
- cheese
- nuts (salted or unsalted, not dry roasted – check for wheat starch on the label)
- popcorn (butter is ok, skip the flavors)
- chips – start with plain ones until you are ready to read labels
- peanut butter in celery sticks
- yogurt
- water, milk, juice



Step 2 - Add some GF specialty products

You will want to add some specialty gluten-free foods to your diet quite quickly, to help fill in some gaps, particularly for breakfast. Manufacturers are under a legal obligation to make sure that if they use the words “Gluten-Free” on their labels, the products are actually gluten free.



Tip: If a product says “Wheat Free” but not “Gluten Free”, don’t buy it. It will probably have oats or barley malt in it.

Where to shop

If you shop at a large grocery chain, your store may carry some gluten free products every day. Some times they put the products in the Natural Choice or Nature’s Choice section; sometimes the products are integrated into the normal aisles.

In other places, gluten free products are left to the specialty health food or natural market. Whole Foods and Trader Joes carry a variety of gluten-free products.

If you live in a smaller town, you may want to turn to the Internet to get started. Amazon.com carries a large variety of gluten-free products. So does Glutenfree.com. Both places will deliver the products to your home or office.

What to buy

For your first shopping trip, look for a few basics:

- crackers or pretzels
- cereal, if you like that for breakfast
- pasta
- cookies or sweets



Crackers or **pretzels** are useful to add to your lunch or snacks to eat with peanut or nut butter, cheese, jam, and jelly. You can even make mini sandwiches with them.

You will find a few gluten-free **cereals** in the main cereal aisle. Rice Chex was reformulated in 2008 to make them gluten free, and other Chex cereals will be reformulated in 2009, but these cereals are the exception. You might expect that rice and corn cereals would be fine, but most of them have barley malt as an ingredient. More gluten-free cereals are available in the specialty aisles and stores.

If you want **hot cereal**, consider cream of rice, corn meal porridge, or grits. Leave oatmeal out of your diet until you have (1) reviewed the recommendations from various medical advisory panels, and (2) located a source of pure and uncontaminated oats from

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a specialty supplier. Normal brands of oats are not acceptable for people with celiac disease because they all contain traces of barley or wheat.

There are several good brands of gluten-free **pasta**. Most are made from rice or brown rice. Others are made from corn, potato, and quinoa. You can use them like regular pasta, although they might be stickier than normal wheat pasta unless you rinse them well after cooking. Follow the cooking instructions on the package.

If you have a sweet tooth, look for **cookies** or bars labeled gluten-free. There are a variety of flavors available from many different manufacturers.

What about Bread?

Whether you tackle gluten-free bread right off the start is an individual choice. Virtually everyone is disappointed when they first try gluten-free bread, rolls, or bagels, because the products do not have the same texture as wheat products.

If you are already feeling upset and overwhelmed, leave the bread for a while and try some other products first.

When you are ready to buy bread, buy two other things first:

- a new toaster – cheap is good for this toaster
- a new cutting board



The new toaster is to avoid accidentally getting wheat crumbs on your gluten-free bread. If you look inside your current toaster, you will see a big pile of crumbs at the bottom of the toaster and often some buildup on the wires. When you share a toaster with someone eating regular bread, you will contaminate your gluten-free bread with wheat every time you use the toaster.

Gluten-free bread usually works best when it is toasted, even when you are making a sandwich. It might hold together when it is first baked, but after it is frozen, it often crumbles when you eat it, unless it is toasted first.

The new cutting board is to protect you from getting wheat crumbs when you make toast or a sandwich after someone else has done the same thing with wheat bread. You can clean a cutting board so that cross-contamination doesn't happen, but it becomes very easy to forget to do it over time. Always using your own cutting board just prevents mistakes from happening.



Tip: Crumbs matter when you are eating gluten free. If you have celiac disease, your body will be damaged by crumbs from someone else's toast whether they come from the toaster or from a shared butter dish.

Step 3 - Find out which regular foods are gluten free

A lot of regular processed foods are gluten free too. You can find brands of ketchup and icing sugar that are labeled “gluten free” but why pay specialty prices when the same brands everyone else eats are fine?

The key is learning to read product ingredient labels. This is a skill you need to learn, but as you practice you become better at it.

Rule # 1: Read every label every time you buy the product. Ingredients change over time.

Rule #2: If you can't tell from an ingredient list if the product is safe for you to eat, don't eat it until you have confirmed the status with the manufacturer.



Tip: When you call a manufacturer to ask if a product is gluten free, they will ask you for the bar code number of the product you are asking about. Call from the supermarket.

Should I buy a product list?

A number of companies and support groups sell lists of “Gluten-Free Products”. Should you buy one? I recommend that you don't for two reasons.

1. You might end up eating products that contain gluten because your list is out of date. Ingredients change over time. Just because a product was or was not gluten free when someone asked the company about it, does not mean that it will be the same a week or a month or a year later.
2. You will end up with a much more limited diet than you need to if you only eat products that are on the list. There might be something you would love sitting right next to an “approved” product on the shelf, but you won't know because it is not on the list.

How do I learn to read labels

1. Buy a *Pocket Dictionary - Acceptability of Foods & Food Ingredients for the Gluten-Free Diet* (from www.celiac.ca) or the *Celiac Ingredient Computer Dictionary* (www.ClanThompson.com)
2. Buy *Learn to Shop Gluten Free*, a short course from www.LearnToEatGlutenFree.com
3. Review a variety of books on the subject (www.learntoeatglutenfree.com/bookstore.html)
4. Contact your local support group.

Now what?

Everyone reacts differently to being put on a strict gluten-free diet for life.

- Some people are happy because they finally have a reason for their health problems and a way to make things better.
- Some people get angry at being forced into a gluten-free diet or at their doctor for taking so long to diagnose their problem
- Some people declare that everything gluten-free tastes like crap and they are going to eat what they want to eat, no matter what.
- Others refuse to eat anything they haven't prepared themselves and become prisoners in their own homes.

Most people respond in one of two ways to these feelings

- they eat gluten free, sort of, but they regularly cheat on their diet, putting their current and future health at risk
- or
- they stick to an extremely limited set of foods and are constantly unhappy about it. They leave themselves open to potential nutritional complications because they don't eat a healthy variety of foods.

I coach both types of people. Coaches have two main roles – they teach basic and advance skills for a task and they encourage people to master those skills.

That is exactly my approach. I **teach** you to identify safe foods for eating at home, at work, out with friends, and while travelling by using label reading, making phone calls, and asking appropriate questions. I also **encourage** to use those skills as you build your new gluten-free life.

I use the methods I've developed for myself over more than a dozen years of eating gluten free. I got some great tips from people over the years, but most of the time, I had to work things out for myself. Today, I cook gluten-free food, eat in restaurants and at friends homes, and travel for both business and work.

I have taught and encouraged hundreds of people who were new to celiac disease and the gluten free diet in both individual and group coaching sessions. Most of these people have had found that adopting a gluten-free diet has profoundly affected their lives – improving their health and their overall outlook on life.

I can help you build your new gluten-free life too. Invest in your life and schedule a coaching call today. Check www.LearntoEatGlutenFree.com for more details.