Gluten-Free Basics

Gluten is a protein in wheat, barley, and rye. Most breads, pastas, breakfast cereals, cookies, and crackers have gluten. Other foods—such as soups, sauces, condiments, and gravies—sometimes have gluten, too. Some supplements and medications may also contain gluten. Learning to follow a gluten-free diet takes time, but you will soon get the hang of it!

Reading Food Labels for Gluten

Each time you shop, read the labels on all packaged food products because recipes and labels may change. Most foods labeled “gluten-free” can be a safe part of your diet. If a food is not labeled gluten-free, read the ingredients list and the “Contains” statement on the label. In general, any of these words means the food contains gluten:

- Wheat
- Barley
- Rye
- Oats (see note below)
- Malt (unless a gluten-free source is named, such as corn malt)
- Brewer’s yeast

A Note about Oats

Oats do not naturally contain gluten. However, they may become mixed with small amounts of wheat, barley, or rye when they are harvested or processed. Only oats labeled gluten-free are safe to eat.

Most people with celiac disease can eat up to ½ cup (dry) gluten-free rolled oats or ¾ cup (dry) gluten-free steel-cut oats each day. However, some people cannot eat even gluten-free oats. Before adding them to your diet, ask your doctor or registered dietitian nutritionist if gluten-free oats are okay for you.

Who should follow a gluten-free diet?

You may be told to follow a diet free of gluten if you have celiac disease or non-celiac gluten sensitivity (gluten intolerance). Before you start a gluten-free diet, your doctor should test you for celiac disease. If you begin a gluten-free diet before you are tested, the test results may not be accurate. There is no need to remove gluten from your diet unless you have a medical reason for doing so.