GLUTEN-FREE DIET: AVOID GLUTEN CONTAMINATION

When you have celiac disease, even minute amounts of gluten will affect the health of your intestinal tract, your quality of life and your long-term health. Do your best to avoid gluten; including tiny, minuscule amounts of gluten that may contaminate your gluten-free foods during food preparation and handling. You cannot avoid gluten all together. The reality is that you will be exposed to gluten at some point, but there are important steps that you can take to minimize your exposure.

At Home

Tiny amounts of gluten hidden in foods will cause damage to the intestinal lining, even when you can't feel it. Avoid cross contamination in your home by following these guidelines and practicing vigilance in keeping gluten-containing foods separate from gluten-free foods.

- If you live alone, throw out or give away anything that contains gluten or could have been contaminated with gluten, such as peanut butter or mayonnaise.
- If you live with non-celiacs, put vividly colored stickers on your food.
- Designate a place in your kitchen as yours and do not let others prepare gluten-containing foods in that area.
- Discard wooden cooking utensils, wooden cutting boards and non-stick pans, pots and baking dishes have been used for gluten-containing cooking and baking. These are all contaminated with gluten. Purchase new wooden and non-stick cooking and meal preparation equipment for gluten-free cooking.
- Buy a toaster, waffle iron, stovetop griddle, and bread machine for your use only.
- Use soap and water liberally. Clean dishes and utensils very well to remove gluten. Keep your sponge clean. Put dishes that have come in contact with gluten into the dishwasher immediately. Antibacterial hand gels do not remove gluten.
- Avoid bulk bins with shared scoops.
- Flour sifters should not be shared with gluten-containing flours.
- Wash hands immediately after handling gluten so that you don't contaminate other foods or dishes.
- Always wash hands before you eat.

Eating Out

There are many strategies to use when eating out. With practice and patience, dining out will become a pleasurable experience! Do not hesitate to question the owner, manager, server or chef regarding food preparation and ingredients. If he/she is unable to answer your questions about a specific dish, ask to speak with someone who can answer your questions. In general, one can avoid gluten in restaurants by ordering whole, unprocessed foods. An example of a "safe" alternative: grilled salmon (without marinade or sauce), fresh steamed vegetables, and a baked potato. But there are many more options than this available to you. Be clear and firm in requesting information regarding gluten-free food options and procedures in place to prevent contamination with gluten.

This is a list of questions adapted from the Southern Arizona Celiac Support website:

- Do salads contain croutons? If so, can salads without croutons be made in a separate bowl to avoid cross-contamination?
- Have salad greens been touched with hands that have held bread or other gluten-containing foods? If so, are there fresh greens that can be used for my salad?
- Are salad dressings homemade, or do they use commercial brands? Verify which dressing is gluten-free, and ask what substitutions can be made for non-gluten-free dressings. Use oil and vinegar when you are not sure and when gluten-free dressings are not available.
- Is cheese served on salads or entrées? What type of cheese is it? Most "real" cheese is gluten free, but some processed cheese is not, especially if it is seasoned. Blue cheese, and its close relative, Gorgonzola, are traditionally made from growing mold on bread crumbs; whether or not to consume them is an individual choice. If the cheese is pre-shredded, verify it is "real" cheese.

GLUTEN-FREE DIET: AVOID GLUTEN CONTAMINATION

- Are soups homemade? If so, how is the stock made? Is any soup starter, flavoring, or bouillon used? Be wary of any soup broth that is not pure stock.
- Are meats, poultry, and fish marinated? If so, does it arrive at the restaurant pre-marinated, or is it done at the restaurant? Verify all ingredients, as soy sauce is often used in marinades. Some local restaurants use beer (made with barley) as a marinade, so be sure to check that also.
- Which meat, poultry, and fish are prepared without any breading?
- Do the meat, poultry, and fish come into contact with breaded items during the cooking process, such as on the grill or in a sauté pan? If so, what can be done to avoid the cross-contamination? Suggest clean pans and utensils.
- Which entrées are served with a sauce? Ingredients of the sauce? Is it possible for a sauce to be made without a gluten-containing thickener?
- Which items are cooked in a deep fryer? Is there a separate fryer for items that do not contain gluten?
- Are clean sauté pans and woks used for gluten-free foods with fresh cooking oil?
- Which side items are gluten free? Is rice cooked in a broth?
- How are vegetables cooked? Some restaurants steam vegetables in the same water that is used to cook pasta.
- Ask about brands of condiments used. Does the restaurant always use the same brand of a particular product, or do they substitute?
- Are any desserts gluten free?
- For Mexican restaurants: Are the corn tortillas pure corn, or is wheat flour added for better texture? If tortillas are made on premises, are the corn tortillas made in a separate area from the flour tortillas? Are they dipped in the same oil before heating? Can they be heated and served separate from the flour tortillas?
- For Asian restaurants: Do they have wheat-free soy sauce? Can a celiac bring in their wheat-free soy sauce? Are rice noodles served? Are egg rolls or other similar items made with rice wrappers cooked in the same oil as those with flour wrappers? Are cooking pans and utensils washed between entrée preparations to avoid cross-contamination? What other sauces are used in the restaurant? Ingredients?
- When food is being packed to-go, please do not use utensils that have gluten contamination to package my food.