

Setting Up Your Gluten-Free Kitchen

By Carol Kicinski



So you have figured out you have a gluten intolerance or even celiac disease.

Now what?

At first the idea of a gluten-free diet may seem daunting. For people with celiac disease or gluten intolerance there really is no choice if you want to regain and maintain good health. Learning the correct data is important but applying the data reasonably is also very important.

Celiac disease and gluten intolerance are autoimmune diseases (when the immune system makes a mistake and attacks the body's own tissues or organs) that damage the small intestine causing a lot of symptoms, including, but not limited to: chronic intestinal problems, migraine headaches, infertility, chronic anemia, obesity, arthritis, memory loss, psoriasis, eczema, IBS, low thyroid (hypothyroidism), chronic fatigue syndrome, type 1 or type 2 diabetes, autism, and fibromyalgia. If not treated, celiac disease can actually be fatal!

The simple and unfortunate fact is that there is no known cure for celiac disease or gluten intolerance. The only treatment is to commit to a gluten-free diet. On the flip side, committing to a gluten-free diet can restore good health and improve the quality of your life – a pay-off well worth the effort!

What is vitally important to understand from the beginning is that ANY amount of gluten causes the symptoms to occur. Lessening the amount of gluten intake does no good. You must truly go *completely gluten-free*. Even down to the minuet quantity of parts-per-million (ppm) in a food product. It is generally accepted that a food has to contain less than 20 ppm – that's 20 little particles out of 1,000,000 particles – in order to be safely "gluten-free"!

Having said that, I LOVE to cook and eat good foods and I hate diets! So the challenge became how to live my lifestyle around my gluten intolerance.

I'll teach you how to accomplish that seemingly daunting task in today's world of food products.

After more than 20 years of living gluten-free, it is second nature to me now. I do, however, recall the initial confusion and frustration following my diagnosis. Many of the foods I fed myself and my family were suddenly "off limits." I learned that a lot of the foods I turned to for comfort, enjoyment and which were often my favorite flavors were in fact poison to my body.

I have broken down the process of setting up your gluten-free kitchen into three simple steps:

Educate – *learn how.*

Purge – *get rid of the gluten.*

Replenish – *supply yourself with gluten-free foods.*

Armed with this information and following these actions you can begin the journey to vitality and good health with ease, even if you share your kitchen with people who do not follow a gluten-free diet.

Educate

Knowledge is power. We gain knowledge through education. With the correct knowledge we gain control over any situation. In the case of gluten-free living, having the correct knowledge, puts the power of vitality, vigor and health in your own hands.

How fabulous is it to know that in most cases celiac disease and gluten intolerance do not require medication and operations to correct? You can literally change the quality of your life with what you don't eat and, most importantly, what you *do* eat.

What is Gluten?

The first step of education is to understand what gluten is and where it's found.

Gluten is a protein. A "protein" is a substance containing nitrogen, found in all living organisms – animal and vegetable. Gluten is found in most grains.

When mixed with liquid it becomes starchy and "gluey." Remember as a kid you mixed flour with water and made glue? You may have even used it to make papier-mâché which hardened into a desired form. That was

the gluten in the flour and that is what makes baked goods stay together and gravies and sauces thicken. It also adds elasticity to foods – it is what helps bread dough to rise and pizza dough to stretch. Most people would consider these to be desirable qualities.

For the human body, however, ingesting gluten is very much like eating just a tiny bit of rat poison. It won't kill you right away but the long term effects are very detrimental. Your body perceives gluten in the same way it would rat poison – as a toxin.

Where is Gluten Found?

So where is gluten found? Grains and starches that contain gluten are: wheat, wheat germ, wheat grass, wheat germ oil, rye, barley, kamut, spelt, triticale, graham flour, bulgur, farina, couscous, and semolina.

Oats, oat bran and oat fiber may contain gluten.

Cross Contamination

Oats themselves are gluten free, however, due to the commercial processing of most oats they become glutinous often because of what is called “cross contamination.” Cross contamination is where one type of food is processed on the same equipment as another, resulting in the gluten being transferred from the grain containing gluten to the naturally gluten-free grain.

Foods Containing Gluten

The following list of foods should be avoided entirely.

Breads, crackers, muffins, cookies, cakes, pies, pancakes, waffles, croutons, cereals, bran, pasta, pizza, pita bread, pita chips, broth (chicken, beef and vegetable), bullion or stock cubes, canned soups, breading mixes, sauces, matzo, processed lunch meats, crab cakes, stuffing, sausages, meatballs, meat loaf, self-basting poultry, meat substitutes such as seitan, tofurky and others, imitation seafood, imitation bacon, bacon bits, soy-based veggie burgers, soy sauce, tamari, Rice Dream, malt and malt flavoring, malt vinegar, blue cheese, beer, brown rice syrup and dry roasted nuts.

Foods that may or may not Contain Gluten

Here is where it starts to get confusing and where you may get the feeling that there is “nothing to eat.” But that is simply not true. There is an abundance of gluten-free foods you can safely eat and enjoy. We will get into the foods you *CAN* eat a little later.

In order to avoid frustration and confusion, it's important that you educate yourself on how to read food labels. Food labels often have big, long, unpronounceable words that very few of us know the meaning of or what the product contains.

Fortunately, new food labeling practices now list out common allergens such as "wheat" and "gluten." However there is no substitute for knowing yourself what is safe and what is not. Often the problem of accidentally eating gluten comes from buying a product that should not contain gluten but does and not checking the label – a perfect example of this is a self-basting turkey in which wheat is added to a naturally gluten-free food, thus making it unsafe.

List of Common Ingredients that are Questionable

Artificial color, caramel color, caramel flavoring, dextrans, Dextri-Maltose, emulsifiers, food starch, modified food starch, hydrolyzed plant protein, hydrolyzed protein, hydrolyzed vegetable protein, hydrogenated starch hydrolysate, hydroxypropylated starch, maltose, miso, MSG (mono sodium glutamate), natural flavoring, natural flavors, natural juices, non-dairy creamer, pregelatinized starch, protein hydrolysates, smoke flavoring, soy sauce solids, sphingolipids, stabilizers, vital wheat gluten, and wheat starch.

Sometimes the above ingredients contain gluten and sometimes they do not. Always look at the label and see if wheat and/or gluten are listed as allergens. If in doubt, contact the manufacturer and find out if the product is gluten-free.

What you CAN Eat!

Ok, so now you are probably thinking "what on earth *can* I eat?" Here is the good news.

All fresh fruits and vegetables are gluten-free as are fresh meats, poultry, fish, seafood and eggs. Beans, potatoes, corn and rice are gluten-free as well as the following grains: amaranth, arrowroot, buckwheat, flax, garfava, millet, quinoa, sorghum, soy, tapioca and teff. Nuts and seeds are safe as well as nut flours.

Natural dairy products are gluten-free with the possible exception of blue cheese. Sometimes blue cheese has an additive which is not safe, so always check first. Butter, margarine, and oils are all safe. Herbs and spices are gluten free in their natural state but sometimes spice mixes such as taco seasoning can contain gluten.

Sugar and chocolate is gluten-free!

I realize this is a lot of information and that it can seem daunting. Don't worry. I am including a shopping list

in the Replenish Section to make things easier.

In the beginning, sticking with natural gluten-free foods which are processed as little as possible is the best bet. Not only will you be eating gluten-free but you will also be eating much healthier in general.

Purge

Now that you have a better idea of what you can and cannot eat, it is time to purge!

You need to go through your refrigerator, pantry, spice cabinet and even your vitamin cabinet and get rid of anything that contains gluten. It is also the time to go through some of your appliances and kitchenware.

My best advice is to set aside ample time to go through your kitchen at one time. Plan on a few hours where you can get the job done in one fell swoop and do this as soon as possible. Getting rid of unsafe foods will make it easier to throw a meal together without much thought and effort as you won't have to stop and read labels.

Before you start the purge it is a good idea to have plenty of plastic or glass containers or plastic storage bags on hand for storing your pantry items and something with which to label them like a magic marker. This is especially important if you share a household with people who eat gluten.

Sort Into 3 Sections

Remove all the food from the fridge, pantry and spice cabinets and sort into the following three sections.

Safe Foods

The first section is for safe foods. This is where you will put everything you know for sure is gluten-free.

Unsafe Foods

The second section is for foods you know for sure are not gluten-free. If you are making your household completely gluten-free then these foods will either be thrown out, given away or donated. If you share a household with people who still eat gluten then you can keep these for them. You will want to put things like flour, cereals and baking mixes into non-porous containers to keep cross contamination from occurring. Just an open cereal box of gluten cereal can cause cross contamination. It is important to have the gluten eaters in your house do this step in order to keep you from becoming ill.

If you are making your kitchen completely gluten-free then you will want to give away any non-safe foods to friends or relatives who still eat gluten. Unopened boxes, bags and cans can be donated to charity if you wish. This is not only a nice thing to do but you can get a tax deduction for it as well.

If you share your household with gluten eaters you need to realize that sharing condiments is not a good idea. If the gluten eater spreads some jam on his or her toast then sticks the knife back into the jam jar the "safe" jar of jam has just become unsafe. Put anything like butter, jam, mustard, mayonnaise, etc. that has been used by a gluten eater in the not gluten-free section.

Uncertain Foods

The third section is for foods you are not certain about. These will require a little research. You can go on the internet and search out if the food contains gluten or not or you can contact the manufacturer. When in doubt, if you can not verify that the food is gluten-free, consider it not safe. It is always better to err on the side of safety.

Clean the Fridge and Pantry

Once you have sorted the food, it is time to clean the refrigerator and pantry. Gluten is a tiny molecule and a sticky one at that. It sticks and clings to things long after the offending food item has been removed. Clean your refrigerator, pantry and spice cabinet well, those disinfectant wipes work well for this.

Gluten Free Zone

If you share your household with gluten eaters, after you have cleaned everything, it is time to divide the real estate. Set aside some space in the fridge and pantry that is strictly a gluten-free zone.

If possible have your gluten-free shelves higher than the non-gluten-free shelves. Gravity being what it is, it is possible for some flour or other food particles to drift down onto your gluten-free foods especially if they are not properly sealed and stored.

Once you have divided the real estate, start putting away the food. If you are keeping foods containing gluten, transfer them into non-porous containers and label them. Mark condiment jars that have been contaminated accordingly.

This may seem like a lot of work but when you are done you will not only have a safe kitchen but it will be clean and well organized!

Kitchen Appliances and Equipment

Once the food is taken care of it is time to look over your appliances and equipment.

The toaster and bread maker are the most obvious appliances that will be contaminated with gluten. If you cannot afford initially to buy a new toaster, you can purchase toaster bags on the internet that you place your gluten-free bread into and then place that in the toaster. If you plan on making your own bread with a bread maker, unfortunately you will need to replace your old one. If your blender has a rubber gasket you will need to either replace the blender or the rubber gasket with a new one.

The rule of thumb here is that non-porous materials such as glass, metal and Pyrex are fine. Porous storage, cooking and baking materials such as plastic, vinyl and wood will need to be replaced.

Non-stick skillets and pans with scratches are not safe as the gluten gets into those scratches and sticks. If it makes you feel any better, the coating on non-stick cookware can be toxic if scratched so they should be replaced in any case. If it is too big of an expense to replace the cookware then just buy one skillet for your own use that is in a size you will get the most use out of (8 or 9 inch is probably good in most cases) and use that for your pan until you eventually replace the others.

Cutting boards are a hot bed for hidden gluten. They make colored vinyl cutting boards that are very inexpensive these days so you should buy a couple of those. The color will help you know which ones are the gluten-free boards without having to label.

Old wooden spoons and vinyl and plastic utensils should not be used. Again, you can start with one all purpose utensil until you eventually build up your new supply. The best all purpose utensil is a silicon spatula – it can be used for multiple purposes including being used with heat.

Vitamins and Medications

Finally you need to take a look at any vitamins or medications you take. Check the labels to see if they are gluten-free. If you can't easily tell, look it up online or get with your pharmacists or doctor. Nothing can be as disheartening than to think you are sticking to a completely gluten-free diet only to find out the vitamin pill you take every day is slowly counteracting all your good efforts.

Clean the Kitchen

After all offending food, vitamins and cookware items have been removed or stored separately it is time to clean the whole kitchen. Clean all the counters, shelves and doors with hot soapy water or disinfectant wipes. Also, if

you are sharing your kitchen with gluten eaters make sure they know what cutting boards, pans and utensils to use and clean up well if they, for instance, make a sandwich with wheat bread. Again, hot soapy water or disinfectant wipes work well.

Cross Contamination

Another thing to keep in mind with baking and cooking is that if others in your home cook or bake with gluten products you need to ensure no cross contamination is happening. For example, if one is baking with gluten flour and sugar and measures the flour first then sticks the same measuring cup in the sugar canister that sugar is no longer safe.

Measuring cups and spoons need to be washed well before dipping them into another canister if a gluten product is being used. The best solution is that each canister has its own scooper.

Now that your kitchen is safe, clean and organized it is time to stock up on foods you can safely eat and enjoy.

Replenish

Now it is time to restock your fridge and pantry with plenty of gluten-free foods. I always advise people new to a gluten-free diet to stick with foods that are naturally gluten-free – beef, chicken, fish, fruits and vegetables, rice and potatoes, etc. Not only does it help your body to heal the intestines by staying away from grains but it gives your taste buds a chance to adjust and for cravings to stop.

There are a number of gluten-free breads, cereals, cake mixes, etc. that are becoming more and more readily available and are well marked as being gluten-free.

Shopping List

I have attached a basic gluten-free shopping list that you can print off and take to the store with you to help you in your grocery shopping. Realize these are not the only foods you can eat – just a starting point.

Never Assume There is No Gluten!

I can't stress enough the importance of reading labels! Any packaged or processed food needs to be checked to make sure there is no hidden gluten. Even meats such as lunch meat and sausage can contain gluten, so never assume just because a food shouldn't contain gluten that it doesn't.

Where to Shop

Most foods can be purchased at a regular grocery store. However, many grains and prepackaged mixes may need to be purchased from health food stores or from the internet.

Baked Goods, Mixes and Cereals

Not all gluten-free baked goods and mixes are created equal. Some are much better than others and some will be more to your tastes than others. When you find a brand of bread or brownie mix for example that you particularly enjoy, make note of the brand for future purchases. There will be some trial and error initially and processed gluten-free foods can be a little more expensive, just another reason to stick with naturally gluten-free foods in the beginning.

When buying cereals, make sure to check the labels to see if they contain wheat or other gluten ingredients – do not assume that because it is a rice or corn based cereal that offending ingredients have not been added. Many regular grocery stores now carry gluten-free cereals that clearly say “gluten-free” on the label.

Avoid Feeling Deprived

The very best way to avoid feeling deprived is to stock up on safe foods you love to eat and to have a few special treats on hand. It is easier to resist a piece of pie if you have something else to enjoy that you love and you know you can eat.

When you come home with your abundance of gluten-free foods, remember to transfer things like grains, cereals and flours into non-porous containers if you share the kitchen with gluten eaters to prevent cross contamination.

Think Gluten Free!

What I have personally found the most helpful is to change the way I think. I no longer look at the world of food in terms of what I can't eat but what I *can* eat. There is a whole big, beautiful, abundant world of naturally gluten-free foods available out there – splurge on them and know that you are taking control of your health simply by what you put in your mouth.

Setting up your gluten-free kitchen is an adventure that leads to improved health and quality of life.

The Basic Gluten-free Shopping List

Produce:

- All fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruits and vegetables
- All potatoes including sweet potatoes and yams

Dairy:

- Milk (whole, low fat and fat free)
- Buttermilk
- Cream
- Half-and-half
- Butter
- Margarine
- Cheese, with the possible exception of blue cheese
- Yogurt
- Ice cream (unless gluten containing ingredients have been mixed in, such as cookies)

Proteins:

- Eggs
- Fresh beef
- Fresh pork
- Fresh poultry (not self-basting)
- Fresh bison
- Fresh organ meats
- Gluten-free lunch meats and sausages, such as Boar's Head brand
- Fresh fish
- Fresh (not artificial) seafood

Beans & Legumes:

- All dried, fresh or canned beans
- Lentils
- Chickpeas

Nuts & Seeds:

- All with the possible exception of dry roasted nuts

Pasta:

- Only those made from beans, corn, peas, potatoes, quinoa, rice, soy and wild rice

Grains:

- Amaranth
- Arrowroot
- Buckwheat
- Chestnut flour
- Coconut flour
- Corn flour
- Corn masa flour
- Cornmeal
- Flax
- Garfava
- Millet
- Oats - only certified gluten-free
- Polenta
- Quinoa
- Rice
- Sorghum
- Soy
- Tapioca
- Teff

Herbs & Spices:

- All fresh and dried if natural, beware of spice mixes

Baking Products:

- Arrowroot powder
- Baking soda
- Baking powder (most, check label)
- Corn starch
- Extracts - pure, not artificial
- Guar gum
- Xanthan gum
- Non-stick cooking spray (without added flour)

Condiments:

- Mayonnaise
- Oils
- Mustard
- Ketchup
- Apple Cider Vinegar
- Balsamic Vinegar
- Champagne Vinegar
- Distilled Vinegar
- Wine Vinegars
- Olives
- Pickles - most, but not all
- Relishes
- Gluten-free soy sauce
- Jam
- Jelly
- Marmalade
- Salsa
- Tomato sauce & paste
- Worcestershire sauce (in the U.S., not Canada and Britain)

Sweeteners:

- Sugar - granulated, brown and confectioners'
- Agave nectar
- Honey
- Corn syrup
- Maple syrup
- Molasses
- Aspartame

Soups:

- Only gluten-free Canned or boxed soups and broths

Snacks:

- Popcorn
- Soy nuts

Beverages:

- Water, plain and sparkling
- Coffee
- Tea
- Fruit juice, fresh & Canned
- Coconut milk & water
- Almond milk
- Soy milk
- Rice milk (some)
- Soft drinks
- Distilled alcoholic beverages such as rum, gin, and tequila
- Wine
- Pure liqueurs