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**Eating a Gluten-Free Diet Away From Home**

**Following a gluten-free diet can be hard when you eat somewhere other than home.**

To help you have a safe and enjoyable time when you eat away from home, follow these guidelines unless you are told otherwise. Use what you already know about gluten-free foods to help you make good choices.

**Finding a restaurant**

* Ask a local celiac disease support group for names of restaurants in your area that serve gluten-free foods. This information can help whether you have celiac disease or dermatitis herpetiformis.
* Call restaurants you are interested in visiting and ask if they have a gluten-free menu. Ask what precautions they take to avoid cross-contamination, such as using a separate grill or deep fryer.
* Contact the companies who own chain restaurants and ask for a list of the gluten- free foods served in their restaurants or check their websites.
* There are several cellphone apps and online restaurant guides that may help you identify restaurants that have gluten-free menus or items. However, the accuracy of these may vary considerably.

**Before you go to a restaurant**

* Review the menu or call the restaurant to see what is offered.
* If possible, plan your restaurant visit for a less busy time so that servers and chefs have more time to answer your questions and cater to your needs.
* Until you become familiar with the gluten-free diet, take your dietary guidelines with you to the restaurant and refer to them as needed to help coach your server.

**When you order food**

Important! Be aware that cooking does not remove or destroy gluten.

* Tell servers that you have a medical condition and you have to avoid gluten in what you eat and drink. Explain that this is not a lifestyle choice, but rather, a medical need. Explain that even a small amount of gluten could cause problems. Tell servers that if they forget and put your hamburger on a bun, then you will not be able to eat it because of cross-contamination.
* If you tend to order the same foods at the same restaurants, regularly recheck the ingredients used in the foods. Do this because restaurants sometimes change food suppliers. The new food supplier may have gluten in a food item that the previous supplier did not.
* When you talk to restaurant staff, use a firm, yet polite approach when expressing your needs and asking questions. The restaurant is providing you a service that you are paying for, so it is your right to ask questions and make requests.
* Keep in mind that many restaurant employees are involved in preparing and serving your meal, and you will not be talking to all of them. Even well-meaning and helpful employees may not be familiar with the diet and may not be as cautious as you. Ask your server to be sure to communicate your needs to all employees who will come in contact with your food.
* Order simple foods similar to those you eat at home. Avoid dishes that contain multiple or unfamiliar ingredients unless you can be assured they are gluten-free.
* When you select a menu item, ask the server or chef questions until you are satisfied that the food is safe for you to eat. Also, recipes vary from restaurant to restaurant so always ask how a dish is prepared. Following are a few sample questions and statements you may wish to use.
  + \_\_ What is in the menu item? (If you simply ask if it contains gluten, wheat, rye, oats or barley, you may miss some less obvious sources of gluten such as malt vinegar.)
  + \_\_ Is the meat or fish seasoned with anything?
  + \_\_ Will you ask the chef to clean the grill before preparing my food or do you have a separate grill for gluten-free foods? Examples of foods prepared on a grill include meat, eggs and hash brown potatoes. Some restaurants cook pancakes or toast buns on their grill which could contaminate your food when your food touches the grill.
  + \_\_ Are your French fries cooked in a separate fryer from other foods? What are the ingredients in your French fries and in the cooking oil?
  + \_\_ May I substitute a plain baked potato for French fries?
  + \_\_ Do the vegetables or potatoes have sauce or seasoning on them?
  + \_\_ Can you leave bread and buns off the plate and croutons off the salad?
  + \_\_ Are your hash browns made from only potatoes? Some hash brown potatoes contain flour or other gluten-containing additives.
  + \_\_ Is your rice cooked with bouillon or other seasonings?
  + \_\_ What brand of ice cream do you use? (Become familiar with brands of ice cream you know are gluten-free.) What are the ingredients in your ice cream?

**Quick Tip**

You might want to eat at the same restaurant(s) so you become familiar with the menu and the restaurant employees get to know you.

**Food suggestions**

The following chart contains suggestions for gluten-free foods.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Appetizers** | Fresh fruit, raw vegetables, vegetable or fruit juice |
| **Salads** | Vegetable salad with oil, lemon juice or vinegar\*; fruit |
| **Meats** | Plain roasted, baked or broiled meat, fish or poultry |
| **Vegetables and potatoes** | Steamed, baked, boiled with butter or other gluten-free seasonings |
| **Fats and oils** | Butter, margarine\*, cream, oils |
| **Desserts** | Fresh fruit, gelatin, fruit ice\*, ice cream\* |
| **Beverages** | Coffee, tea, carbonated beverages, milk |

***Additional suggestions***

Following are additional suggestions you should consider when eating at a restaurant.

* Inspect salads for crumbs from removed croutons. If you find crumbs on salad, ask your server to bring you another salad that has never had croutons on it.
* Use apple cider, rice, balsamic or wine vinegar and oil or lemon juice, or bring your own salad dressing for salads. Some restaurant salad dressings contain gluten.
* Avoid ordering soup because most soups — even vegetable or broth-based soups — contain flour or a soup base which contains gluten.
* Avoid breaded or batter-coated foods, as well as fried foods cooked in the same oil as breaded or batter-coated foods. Even a small amount of batter may contaminate your food.
* Make sure seafood is fresh and not imitation.
* Avoid any type of sauce or gravy — including au jus and soy sauce — because most sauces and gravies are made with wheat flour.
* Bring gluten-free bread and rice crackers from home.
* Do not eat meat or cheese that has been in contact with regular bread or buns. Take a toaster bag with you to the restaurant if you want your bread toasted.

**Ethnic restaurants**

If you eat in an ethnic restaurant, follow these safety precautions.

* Make sure you can communicate clearly with the server or chef.
* Many dishes in Mexican, Asian, Middle Eastern and other ethnic cuisine contain sauces, seasonings and multiple ingredients. Be certain that every ingredient is gluten-free.
* Some ingredients may be imported. Other countries have different labeling requirements so it may not be possible to know whether the item contains gluten.

**Eating at other people's homes**

***Before you go***

* If your host or hostess is a relative or friend, let him or her know about your need for a gluten-free diet ahead of time. Be sure they understand the importance of food handling to prevent cross-contamination. You may wish to offer to bring a gluten-free food item or two to share at the party. You can also bring gluten-free crackers, rolls or bread along to supplement the gluten-free items on the party menu.
* Eat something before going to the party so that you are not hungry when you arrive. It is easier to resist temptation when you are less hungry.

***When you are at their home***

* Follow your gluten-free diet, eating only the foods you are certain are gluten-free. When in doubt, go without.

**Eating at special events**

***Before the event***

* Find out from the event organizer if you can get a gluten-free meal.
* Eat before you go so you are not really hungry when you arrive at the event.

***During the event***

* Take some foods with you (nuts, dried fruit, gluten-free crackers) in case your choices are limited or there is a mistake with your meal request.
* Eat only foods you are certain are gluten-free.

**When you travel**

Personal experience shared by other people with celiac disease can be helpful in making your travel experience enjoyable. Consider contacting the celiac disease support group in the state or country you are traveling to or go online. Be aware that labeling laws for gluten-free are not the same in all countries. Find out about the other country's laws for labeling something as "gluten-free."

***Before you travel***

* When you fly, order a gluten-free meal when you make your flight arrangements. Call to confirm your order the day before your flight. Bring gluten-free foods that you may eat if the airline is unable to provide a gluten-free meal. This is especially important for international flights when flight times and layovers can be long.
* Research hotels and resorts to determine which may be better at catering to your special food needs. Stay in a hotel or motel that has a kitchenette so you can prepare some of your meals. There are many travel websites which provide this type of information.
* Take along breakfast items that are easy to take from home, such as gluten-free cereals and bread, and eat in your room. If you want toast, bring your toaster from home or purchase toaster bags to toast your bread in. Bring gluten-free crackers, nuts, dried fruit, single-serving juice containers, and other gluten-free foods for snacks.
* Look for stores near where you will be staying that carry gluten-free foods.

***While you travel***

* When you travel abroad, carry dining-out cards to explain your diet. These are available in many different languages and some free versions are available on the internet.
* Do not eat anything that you are not sure is gluten-free. Do not assume the meal is gluten-free unless it is labeled that way.
* Tell traveling companions about your need for a gluten-free diet so that they understand your needs.
* Remember that fresh fruits and vegetables may not be allowed into some countries or even Hawaii.

**Tips for kids and teens**

* Let teachers, food service directors, coaches and other adult leaders know you need to eat a gluten-free diet.
* Check with your school district's food service director to see what kind of meals the school provides for students who need to eat a gluten-free diet.
* Keep gluten-free snacks at school so if someone brings a treat that contains or may contain gluten, you will still be able to have a snack.
* Carry snacks with you in your purse or backpack, just in case you are hungry and the snack machine does not have gluten-free food.
* Ask your parents to bring your favorite gluten-free dish to picnics, parties and potlucks so you are assured there is something for you to eat.

**Quick Tip**

Don't let your diet keep you from having fun while traveling!

**When you head off to college**

***While you are choosing a college to attend***

Research colleges you are thinking about attending to see if the college offers gluten-free meals.

***Once you choose a college***

* Contact the food service director and ask these questions:
  + \_\_ How do you label menu items?
  + \_\_ What precautions do you take to avoid cross-contamination?
* Locate grocery stores near your chosen college that stock gluten-free foods.
* Order gluten-free foods online to keep in your room.
* Request a residence hall with a kitchen you can use. Bring small appliances to use, if the school policy allows this.
* Talk to your roommates about your need for a gluten-free diet and the importance of avoiding cross-contamination.

**Speak up!**

Remember, you are your own best advocate. Speak up and be clear with others about your needs. Most people will be understanding and want to help you eat safely.

If you have questions about eating a gluten-free diet when you are away from home or about this information, talk with a dietitian or another health care provider.

This material is for your education and information only. This content does not replace medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. New medical research may change this information. If you have questions about a medical condition, always talk with your health care provider.

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MC1221-01rev0321