



MEALTIME MEMO

September
2025

GLUTEN-FREE DIETS

The gluten-free diet has generated a lot of attention in recent years, with some praising its benefits. However, for people who cannot eat gluten due to medical reasons, such as celiac disease or gluten sensitivity, this diet is not a choice but a necessity. This *Mealtime Memo* defines gluten and how it affects certain individuals, lists foods containing gluten, identifies gluten-free foods, and reviews how to accommodate children who require a gluten-free diet.



What is Gluten?

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye. It makes dough elastic and allows bread, cakes, and other bakery items to rise. It also provides a satisfying, chewy texture to these foods.



Celiac Disease Versus Gluten Sensitivity

People with celiac disease and non-celiac gluten sensitivity (i.e., gluten sensitivity or gluten intolerance) cannot eat foods containing gluten.

- **Celiac disease** is an autoimmune response to gluten that causes the body to attack the small intestine, causing belly pain, diarrhea, fatigue, weight loss, bloating, or anemia, and it can cause malabsorption of nutrients.
- People with **gluten sensitivity** experience symptoms similar to those with celiac disease; however, there is no damage to the intestine.

Eliminating gluten from the diet is the only treatment for these disorders.

Foods Containing Gluten

Gluten is found naturally in the following grains:

Wheat			Barley	Rye
Bulgur	Graham flour	Forms of wheat:	Brewer's yeast	Triticale—a cross between wheat and rye
Durum		• Wheat bran	Malt	
Einkorn	Khorasan	• Wheat germ	Malt extract	
Emmer	Semolina	• Cracked wheat	Malt flavoring	
Farina	Spelt	• Hydrolyzed wheat protein	Malt vinegar	
Farro				

Other Sources of Gluten

Oats are naturally gluten-free, but many products may be contaminated with gluten through cross-contact during food production. Always check for a gluten-free label or contact the manufacturer to confirm.

Foods commonly containing gluten include bread, baked goods, breaded foods (meats, cheeses, vegetables), cereals, crackers, pasta (including couscous), and pizza. Gluten is also added to many processed food products, such as:

- Soup, broth, gravy, and sauces (including soy sauce)
- Dressings, seasonings, and condiments
- Processed meats, such as hot dogs and deli meats
- Processed cheese, yogurt, and ice cream products



Gluten-Free Foods

Here are methods to provide gluten-free foods.

- 1. Serve naturally gluten-free grains.** See list below.
- 2. Check the labels.** The terms in the middle column of the table are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and mean the product contains less than 20 parts per million (ppm) of gluten which is the lowest level that can be detected in foods. Most people with celiac disease can tolerate foods with this very small amount of gluten.
- 3. Read the ingredients.** Avoid products listing wheat, barley, rye, or any derivatives. A product's ingredients can change over time, so always check the label for gluten-containing ingredients.



Naturally Gluten-Free Grains		Gluten-Free Labels	Gluten-Containing Ingredients
Amaranth	Sorghum	"Gluten-free"	Wheat
Brown Rice	Teff	"No gluten"	Barley
Buckwheat	White Rice	"Free of gluten"	Rye
Millet	Wild Rice	"Without gluten"	Any derivatives of these grains
Quinoa	Whole Grain		See list above for examples
Popcorn	Corn		



Accommodating Children With a Gluten-Free Diet

Serving a grain is required at meals in the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). You must provide reasonable meal modifications for children with food-related disabilities. Celiac disease and gluten sensitivity are considered disabilities.

Gluten-free diets can often be managed within meal pattern requirements by including naturally gluten-free grains (see list above), which reduces the need for special foods and eases meal preparation. A medical statement is unnecessary if meals and snacks meet the meal pattern requirements.

When a child's gluten-free diet requires meal modifications that do not meet meal pattern requirements, a medical statement from a State licensed healthcare professional (an individual authorized to write medical prescriptions under State law) or registered dietitian is required. This statement must describe the child's impairment, explain how to accommodate the disability, and list the foods to be omitted and substituted.

Programs are encouraged, but not required, to meet participants' non-disability dietary preferences when planning and preparing CACFP meals.

Helpful Tips!

Refer to the USDA Policy Memo, [Modifications to Accommodate Disabilities in the CACFP and SFSP](#) for more information on medical statements.

Cross-Contact. A gluten-free menu item is only completely safe if cross-contact with gluten is avoided. Cross-contact occurs when an allergen is accidentally transferred from a food containing an allergen to a food or surface that is allergen-free. Refer to the ICN's Food Allergy Fact Sheet: [Avoiding Cross-Contact – Preparing Allergen-Free Food Safely](#) for ways to avoid cross-contact.

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