



Gluten-free foods: a patient's guide to prescriptions



Why do I need gluten-free food?

You need to eat gluten-free foods as part of your gluten-free diet if you suffer from coeliac disease or dermatitis herpetiformis (DH)*.

*For further information about dermatitis herpetiformis please contact Coeliac UK. (See 'Further help and support' on page 10).

What is coeliac disease?

Having coeliac disease means that you are unable to eat gluten. Gluten is a protein found in wheat[†], rye, barley and oats*. If you have coeliac disease then any gluten that you eat damages your small intestine (part of your gastrointestinal tract) and you cannot digest and absorb the nutrients from foods properly.

[†] Many gluten-free foods are made using gluten-free wheat starch. This is wheat that has been treated to remove the gluten that is harmful to the small intestine of people with coeliac disease. Gluten-free wheat starch must comply with internationally agreed criteria (Codex Alimentarius).

*The majority of adults with coeliac disease are able to include up to 50g of oats per day in their gluten-free diet. It is important to ensure that the oats have not been contaminated and if you are unsure you should discuss this with your doctor or dietitian first.

How many people have coeliac disease?

Coeliac disease is an inflammatory condition of the gastrointestinal tract and is one of the most common disorders in the UK - it is estimated that as many as 1 in 100 people in Britain could have it.

What is the treatment for my coeliac disease?

Most people diagnosed with coeliac disease are advised to follow a gluten-free diet, which can include naturally gluten-free products and foods based on gluten-free wheat starch (as defined by the international Codex Alimentarius standard).

A minority of people with coeliac disease may need to follow both a gluten-free and wheat-free diet as they do not respond to just a gluten-free diet. Their dietitian or doctor may advise them to try a gluten-free and wheat-free diet and to exclude gluten-free wheat starch. There are many products available that would be suitable.





How long will I have coeliac disease for?

Although coeliac disease is lifelong - and at present there is no cure - you will feel much better and healthier when you follow a gluten-free diet. By following a gluten-free diet the condition can be controlled and you can lead a healthy life.

What will happen if I don't follow a gluten-free diet?

If you have coeliac disease and you do not follow a gluten-free diet then the surface of your small intestine will become damaged. This means that nutrients such as iron, calcium and certain vitamins, cannot be absorbed properly. The damage to your small intestine may also cause diarrhoea, weight loss, tiredness or anaemia and in children growth may be delayed.

If your coeliac disease is not treated it can lead to more serious diseases such as osteoporosis (a condition that affects your bones), infertility and in some cases even cancer. Fortunately, you can manage the condition by always keeping gluten out of your diet. Sticking to a gluten-free diet means that you are likely to lead a full, healthy life, protected from the health risks associated with the condition.

Who should I talk to about my diet?

When your doctor tells you that you have coeliac disease you should get an appointment to see a dietitian who will give you advice on how to make your diet gluten-free and ensure that it is healthy and balanced. Your dietitian, GP, practice nurse or pharmacist can give you advice about the gluten-free foods available to you on prescription and the amount that you are entitled to.

Getting gluten-free food on prescription should help you stick to your diet and can be cheaper than buying similar foods elsewhere.

You can get additional advice and information from Coeliac UK (See 'Further help and support' on page 10)

Am I entitled to a prescription for gluten-free foods?

To provide good clinical care your doctor must offer you the necessary treatment for your coeliac disease. If you have been told by your doctor that you have coeliac disease then a large variety of gluten-free foods are available to you on prescription. The amount you need depends on your age, gender and lifestyle.

What foods are available to me on prescription?

Many gluten-free versions of everyday staple foods are available on prescription including:

- bread and bread rolls
- plain and savoury biscuits
- crackers and crispbreads
- flour mixes, including speciality cake, bread and pastry mixes
- pasta
- pizza bases

Coeliac UK produces an annual Food and Drink Directory which provides a complete list of prescribable foods and also manufacturer's details.

To help you choose what you may want to receive on prescription many manufacturers are willing to provide samples for you to try before you decide.

How do I know how much gluten-free food I need?

It is a good idea to make an estimate of how much bread, pasta, biscuits etc, you would have normally eaten in a month before being diagnosed with coeliac disease - this will help your doctor calculate how much gluten-free food to prescribe for you.

A dietitian will be able to provide you with further information about your new diet and help you work out how much gluten-free food you should be eating.

Although it may seem like a good idea to ask for large amounts of gluten-free food, remember that some foods do not keep for long periods of time, and that large quantities of food may be difficult to store.

When you are working out how much gluten-free food you need, remember that loaves of gluten-free bread are about half the size of normal loaves of bread.

There are new guidelines available that will help you and your GP decide how much gluten-free food should be prescribed for you. The recommended amounts are based on the **minimum** amounts needed for a healthy diet and take into account your age, gender and lifestyle.

How much can I get on prescription?

The table on pages 6 and 7 gives you a guide to the **minimum** amounts of gluten-free foods you are entitled to on prescription on a monthly basis.



Table: Recommended **minimum** monthly gluten-free food prescription quantities

Note: One unit of gluten-free food is equivalent to, for example, a 400g loaf of bread, 200g biscuits or 250g pasta.

Age group	Suggested no. units per month	Example minimum monthly prescription (items can be interchanged eg bread mixes can be interchanged with rolls or loaves)
Child 1-3 years	10	4 x 400g loaves of bread (or 2 x 500g mix suitable for making bread) 1 x 500g pasta 2 x 200g biscuits 1 x 500g flour mix
Child 4-6 years	11	4 x 400g loaves of bread (or 2 x 500g mix suitable for making bread) 2 x (2 x 110/180g) pizza bases 3 x 200g biscuits 1 x 500g flour mix
Child 7-10 years	13	6 x 400g loaves of bread (or 3 x 500g mix suitable for making bread) 1 x 500g pasta 1 x (2 x 110/180g) pizza bases 2 x 200g biscuits 1 x 500g flour mix
Child 11-14 years	15	6 x 400g loaves of bread (or 3 x 500g mix suitable for making bread) 2 x (2 x 110/180g) pizza bases 3 x 200g biscuits 1 x 500g flour mix 1 x 500g pasta
Child 15-18 years	18	6 x 400g loaves of bread (or 3 x 500g mix suitable for making bread) 2 x (2 x 110/180g) pizza bases 4 x 200g biscuits 2 x 500g flour mix 1 x 500g pasta

Male 19-59 years	18	10 x 400g loaves of bread (or 5 x 500g mix suitable for making bread) 1 x (2 x 110/180g) pizza bases	1 x 500g pasta 2 x 200g crackers/cripbreads 1 x 200g sweet biscuits 1 x 500g flour mix
Male 60-74 years	16	10 x 400g loaves of bread (or 5 x 500g mix suitable for making bread) 1 x 500g cake mix	1 x 500g pasta 1 x 200g crackers/cripbreads 1 x 200g sweet biscuits
Male 75+ years	14	8 x 400g loaves of bread (or 4 x 500g mix suitable for making bread) 1 x 500g cake mix	1 x 500g pasta 1 x 200g crackers/cripbreads 1 x 200g sweet biscuits
Female 19-74 years	14	8 x 400g loaves of bread (or 4 x 500g mix suitable for making bread) 1 x (2 x 110/180g) pizza bases	1 x 500g pasta 2 x 200g crackers/cripbreads 1 x 200g sweet biscuits
Female 75+ years	12	6 x 400g loaves of bread (or 3 x 500g mix suitable for making bread) 1 x 500g cake mix	1 x 500g pasta 1 x 200g crackers/cripbreads 1 x 200g sweet biscuits
Breastfeeding	Add 4 units	1 x 500g pasta 1 x 200g crackers/cripbreads	1 x 400g loaf of bread
3rd trimester pregnancy	Add 1 unit	1 x 200g sweet biscuits	
High physical activity level	Add 4 units	1 x 500g pasta 1 x 200g sweet biscuits	1 x 200g crackers/cripbreads



How often should I get a prescription?

You should discuss this with your doctor. Depending on your situation it may be easier for you to get a prescription every few weeks or monthly. Most people get prescriptions on a monthly basis. If you have to pay for your prescription it may be cheaper for you to buy a pre-payment certificate.

(See 'What is a pre-payment certificate?' on page 9)

Do I need to pay for my prescription?

If you have coeliac disease you can get gluten-free foods on prescription, but you may have to pay the prescription fee for each individual item of gluten-free food that you are prescribed. In this case an item would be classed as multiples of the same product, ie 6 loaves of bread or 4 boxes of biscuits.

Some people are entitled to free prescriptions, including:

- children aged under 16 years
- young people aged between 16 and 18 years in full time education
- people aged 60 years or over
- women who are pregnant, or have had a baby in the last 12 months and have a valid exemption certificate
- people with a listed medical condition and have a valid exemption certificate
- people who have a continuing physical disability which means that they cannot go out without help from another person and have a valid exemption certificate
- NHS in-patients
- people and/or their partner receiving:
 - Income Support
 - Income based Job Seeker's Allowance
 - Pension Credit Guarantee Credit
- people entitled to, or named on, a valid NHS tax credit exemption certificate
- people named on a valid HC2 certificate
- war pensioners, if the prescription is for the accepted disablement and the person has a valid war pension

What is a pre-payment certificate?

If you are not entitled to free prescriptions you may find it cheaper to buy a pre-payment certificate every 4 months, or one for the entire year. Most people with coeliac disease buy pre-payment certificates. This means you pay the government-agreed fee for your prescriptions in advance and this is cheaper than paying for them one at a time. You need to receive more than 5 prescription items in 4 months to benefit from a 4-month certificate, or 14 items in a year to benefit from a 12-month certificate.

Where can I buy/pay for a pre-payment certificate?

In order to buy a pre-payment certificate you must complete an FP95 form. Ask your pharmacist for more information on purchasing a pre-payment certificate or visit the Department of Health website at www.dh.gov.uk to purchase directly from them. You can find out if you are entitled to free prescriptions or find out the current cost of prescriptions by looking on the Department of Health website or by calling **0845 850 0030**.

How do I get repeat prescriptions?

For repeat prescriptions you will need to order your prescription from your GP surgery - check their procedures as some surgeries require 48 hours notice and you may need to plan ahead. You can then pick up your prescription and take it to your pharmacist. Sometimes your prescription can be sent straight to your pharmacist so check if this is possible as it cuts out some of the legwork. The pharmacy may need to order in your request and this may take a couple of days.

There are many different kinds of gluten-free foods available on prescription. If at any time you want to change your prescription you should make an appointment to see your GP or someone else at the surgery that can help you.

Can I get gluten-free foods on prescription for my family even though they don't have coeliac disease?

No. The prescription is only available for people who have coeliac disease.





Further help and support

If you need more advice you can talk to your doctor, dietitian, practice nurse or pharmacist.

Healthcare professionals can obtain further information by requesting a copy of 'Gluten-free foods: a prescribing guide' from **020 7861 3118** or **enquiries@grhealthcare.co.uk**

Additional information and further resources about coeliac disease can also be obtained from Coeliac UK - **www.coeliac.org.uk**

Coeliac UK is the national charity supporting people with coeliac disease, and has over 69,000 members. Membership is free for people who have been diagnosed with coeliac disease or for parents of sufferers up to 16 years old. New members will receive a free literature pack, which will provide them with plenty of information about the condition and treatment.

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