

Eating Out



General Guidelines

Eat at your own risk. No matter how careful you are, the presence of gluten in the restaurant makes contamination a possibility. Restaurants are busy places with a lot of gluten on many, many surfaces (gloves, tables, cutting boards, grills, and pans). You will ingest gluten. But, you can take steps to minimize your exposure.

Don't be shy about asking for what you need. It is your health that is at stake. Restaurants are a service industry and are generally willing to help you as much as possible. A server may be grumpy about having to answer lots of questions, but grumpy servers are much easier to endure than being sick all night. If a server is especially difficult (or especially helpful), reflect this in your tip. If a restaurant is unwilling to accommodate you or treats you as an unwelcome problem, don't return. There is always another restaurant down the road that will be happy to help.

Theme Parks

If you plan to go to an amusement park, be sure to call several days in advance and talk to someone in the food service department about what foods are gluten-free. Disneyland and Disney World are used to gluten-free inquiries; if you book a meal in advance they will have gluten-free food available (even gluten-free pancakes, pasta, and pizza). The bad news is that it takes a bit longer to get your meal. There are also a few things you can have at their fast food places. Smaller parks are less accommodating, but usually there is something you can eat.

Fast Food

A celiac / gluten intolerance diagnosis seems like a curse at first. Eventually, most people come to see it as a blessing in disguise. Because we educate ourselves about nutrition, we learn how unhealthy the typical American diet is. Embrace this learning. Enjoy your new health. Yes, you can eat at McDonalds and Burger King and Wendy's and In/Out and Baja Fresh and more. Be careful. Bread crumbs are everywhere. Even if the manager says the oil only cooks fries... that might not be true.

Selection of eating establishment

- Your success at gluten-free dining will be determined by a number of factors, including the type of restaurant you choose.
- Be careful of restaurants where language may be a communication barrier. Food service workers may not easily understand your dietary restrictions.
- Allow extra time to discuss your needs for a gluten-free meal. Fast food, quick service restaurants, and those with a standard menu may have little time to thoroughly check ingredients.
- Finer dining establishments offer a less harried atmosphere and usually have more time to meet your needs. Also, nicer restaurants are generally better equipped to accommodate special needs.
- Call the restaurant the day before or earlier the same day. Speak to the chef to discuss your meal options. This will increase the quality of your dining experience.
- The chefs in finer dining establishments are generally aware of gluten and can be very helpful.
- Frequent owner-operated restaurants wherever possible. At large chains, the food is usually heavily processed, the staff is less knowledgeable, and getting special attention is unlikely.

Avoid peak rush hours, especially on your first trip to a restaurant. The less crowded a restaurant, the more specialized attention you'll receive. Time your meal earlier or later than the busiest meal time. You will have more time and easier access to the people who can help you. Even the most cooperative server may not have the time you need during 'rush hour'.

Use a Restaurant card and understand the layout of the card so you can guide the staff and answer questions.



Present your special need to the hostess before sitting Some restaurants may simply refuse to accommodate us; you'll want to know that before sitting down. As soon as you can (before you sit down, if possible), state that you have a "medically-required diet" (this gets the point across more clearly than saying you have an allergy and establishes the degree of seriousness with which your diet requirements must be treated) and will need to talk to the manager, cook, or someone who would be familiar with the ingredients used in preparing the food. In most cases, it is better to talk directly to the cook or manager rather than the server.

Get your server on your side.

- Example: (smile) "Hi, I may need your help with my menu selection. I am on a medically restricted diet and am unable to eat some grain products. This includes wheat, rye, oats, barley and any derivatives of these grains. I have some questions and need your help."
- Enlisting the interest and cooperation of your server is essential. They can be your ally or your biggest stumbling block. Do explain your needs to the server so that they understand your needs. When talking to the server, emphasize that they should leave off any bread, crackers, croutons, or other gluten-containing ingredients. State that you don't want anything containing gluten on the plate, as that would cause contamination and render the entire dish inedible to you.

Choose dishes that are likely gluten free, or easily modified. When in doubt, ask the staff for suggestions. Avoid sauces and marinades if ingredient list cannot be confirmed. Avoid deep fried food. The oil is saturated with gluten.

Ask detailed questions.

- Ask a lot of questions and explain (politely) why you would like the wait staff to spend more time serving you.
- Ask that the card be taken to the chef for more assistance in selecting safe menu items. The only person who really knows what went into a dish is the person who made it!
- You may need to ask extensive questions about the foods and preparation. Be very specific in your questions about each item. Below are some foods and the potential problems involved with them:
 - Soups and Sauces: Soup bases are often used as a foundation for soups and sauces. Bases contain ingredients comparable to bouillon or broth, i.e., hydrolyzed vegetable protein, natural flavors, etc., and should be carefully checked. Roux (pronounced 'roo') is the thickening for most sauces and is a combination of butter and flour. It is safest to avoid sauces. Canned sauces are also used in restaurants, so you may be able to check the ingredient listing. Soup base will sometimes appear in sauces.
 - Prime Rib and Other Meats: If prime rib is too rare for the customer's taste, the cook may 'cook' it in a pot of au jus until it reaches the desired doneness. Au jus may come from a can or mix and contain unidentified hydrolyzed vegetable protein. Seasoning is often used in preparing meats; their ingredients should be verified. Self-basting turkeys and imitation bacon bits may contain hydrolyzed vegetable protein or TVP (textured vegetable protein) and need to be checked for safety before using.
 - Fried Foods: The oil used to deep-fry foods may be used for both breaded and non-breaded items, in which case they should be avoided. In large restaurants where French fries are cooked in separate fryers, there is less chance of contamination.
 - Salads: The possibility of contamination lies in the cleanliness of the boards used to chop ingredients and the addition of croutons, pickled beets, or salad dressing. Ask for dressing to be served on-the-side. No croutons or other bread products.
 - Rice, Starches, and Hash Browns: Many hash browns are frozen and pre-packaged with starch added. Ask what other ingredients have been added while cooking them. Many rice pilafs may have seasonings or added ingredients that you may need to avoid. Plain rice, cooked in water, baked or steamed rice are good choices.
 - Salad Dressings and Marinades: Salad dressings and marinades frequently contain natural and artificial flavors. Try ordering a lemon wedge and oil on the side, wine vinegar and oil, or bring a small container of dressing from home.
 - Dairy Products: Non-dairy products are sometimes used instead of dairy products in restaurants. The three most frequently used non-dairy products are non-dairy creamer, non-dairy "sour cream" topping, and non-dairy whipped topping. Verify if the ingredients in the non-dairy substitute are okay.

Have your food prepared on a clean cooking surface, with clean utensils. Check if breaded or gluten-containing food has been cooked on the surface beforehand. Suggest using foil to cook on if this is a problem. Remind them at every opportunity that you do not want bread or croutons to touch your plate.

Confirm your order before eating. Is it the "special" meal you ordered? Were your instructions followed? Always confirm the preparation. Do not assume your entree is not breaded or deep fried. If the plate comes along with a roll sitting next to your steak, hold on to your plate and ask them prepare you a completely new meal, this time leaving off the roll. After you get the new meal, give up your contaminated plate (this way they don't just take your plate to the kitchen and pull off the roll, leaving the crumbs). Be alert to suspicious items such as rice with pasta-looking bits in it ("oh, that's not wheat, it's semolina"), large flour-looking tortillas, or anything that looks like the sauce may have been put on then scraped off.

Be patient and work with people. The gluten-free diet is complicated – it takes most Celiacs months to master! So please be patient with your wait staff who will probably have lots of questions.

Keep a positive attitude and be courteous. Remember, the staff is helping you, so please treat them accordingly.

Thank your food server. Leave a generous tip for good service and if you have an extra brochure, leave it with the management for their information. Return. Patronize the establishment again!

- Chinese and Japanese soy sauces are traditionally brewed with wheat. In Thailand, this is not the case, and a good number of Thai restaurants use gluten-free soy sauce!
- MSG produced in the US is often derived from sugar beets and is deemed safe by major celiac awareness organizations. However, MSG produced abroad is often derived from wheat and gluten-contaminated (Source: CSA). Many Asian restaurants use MSG imported from abroad.
- The grain rye is almost unheard of in India. We consulted multiple Indian chefs, grocers, food distributors, and authoritative printed sources, and no one was familiar with any instance of the grain rye appearing in Indian cooking. NOTE: Please do not confuse "rye," the grain with "rai" the spice. Rai (also spelled "rye") is a small round mustard seed used in Indian cooking. The spice rai is gluten free – though the name might suggest otherwise!

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