

10 Guidelines and Tips for Eating Out

1. Understand gluten free diet guidelines

To safely eat out, you must know what grains to avoid, the hidden sources of gluten and how to avoid cross-contact with gluten.

2. Choose restaurants that have a gluten free options

The most trust-worthy restaurants are those who have certification or training through one of the celiac disease support groups. Restaurants that meet this standard have some knowledge about gluten-free dining and generally make an effort to prepare food in a way that prevents cross-contact. The next best option would be a restaurant that either serves naturally gluten free items or serves items that can easily be made without gluten.

3. Call or stop into the restaurant ahead of time

It can be helpful to speak with the restaurant manager or chef ahead of time to ask questions and discuss gluten free diet restrictions. The best time to call is off-peak times when you are more likely to receive their full attention. Questions to ask include:

- Do you have a gluten free menu?
- What items can be made gluten free?
- Has your restaurant or staff completed a gluten free certification program?
- What measures do you take to avoid cross-contamination?

4. Review menus online

Most restaurants post menu items and allergen information online. Some may also have a list of gluten free menu choices. Reviewing the online menu can help you get an idea of what to order and identify questions to ask staff when you get to the restaurant.

5. Mention you have celiac disease or a “gluten allergy”

Eating gluten free has become a growing trend, and not everyone who eats a gluten free diet has celiac disease. Let staff know you have celiac disease or a “gluten allergy” and ask them if they know what that means. The biggest difference between someone with celiac disease and someone with gluten sensitivity is the need to avoid trace amounts of gluten as well as any cross-contamination. If your server does not know what celiac disease is, inform them that you cannot eat anything that has wheat, rye, or barley including regular flour, bread crumbs, soy sauce, etc. or you will become ill.

6. Ask about cross-contamination

The size of the kitchen will determine whether or not there is space to accommodate separate prep and cook spaces. It is important to know that not all restaurants with gluten-free menus are able to prevent cross-contact with gluten. Some restaurants are more attentive to the details of preparing a safe gluten-free meal than others, so you have to ask a lot of questions as you order. Key questions to ask include:

- Is there a separate prep space for gluten free food?
- Do you use clean or separate cookware and utensils for gluten free food?
- Do you clean the grill before preparing gluten free food?
- Do you have a dedicated fryer for gluten free foods? If not, do you change the oil before cooking gluten free food?

7. Ask detailed questions about how food is prepared

It is best to choose simple dishes without a breading or sauce or items that can be made without these ingredients. Don't assume that anything is gluten free. Cream soups and salad dressings may include wheat flour, French fries and other foods may be coated with flour before frying, and eggs may be prepared on the same griddle/grill as pancakes. Ask about spice blends, thickeners, coatings, and toppings/garnishes.

8. Be prepared to eat something that isn't your first choice

Sometimes you will find an establishment that is not able to provide any safe choices. When this is the case, you have two options: either eat at home before going so you are less tempted to make unsafe menu choices or bring gluten free foods with you.

9. Ask questions and always double check

Do not be afraid to ask questions about wording on the menu if something is unclear. If something seems suspicious when your meal arrives or you are unsure your meal is truly gluten free, don't hesitate to ask questions until you are confident your order has been prepared and delivered properly.

10. Provide feedback

Review the restaurant. Let them know if you had a good or bad experience and explain why. If your dining experience was positive, thank the staff and spread the word.