



Gluten Free Label Reading

Terms to Know

Food and Drug Administration (FDA): U.S. government agency overseeing the processing, handling, safety and labeling of foods and dietary supplements.

20 parts per million (ppm): The amount of gluten widely accepted to be safely eaten and tolerated by people with Celiac disease. It is the equivalent to 1/8 of a teaspoon of all-purpose flour.

Gluten-free: a term FDA allows on a food or supplement package to designate that the product contains less than 20 ppm gluten. "Gluten-free" is an optional labeling term that can be used for foods that are naturally gluten-free (bottled water, canned vegetables, for example) or to distinguish between variations of a product (regular oats versus gluten-free oats).

Label Reading 101

A gluten-free label: If a product claims to be gluten-free on the package, then it is most likely safe to eat. Take note that manufacturers can change their ingredients at any time, so it is a good habit to read labels every time the food is eaten.

When a product is NOT labeled "gluten free", you can determine if it is safe to eat by reading the ingredients label:

- Read the "contains" allergen statement at the bottom of the label.
- If wheat is listed in the "contains" statement, this product is NOT gluten free.
- If wheat is NOT listed in the "contains" statement, you must look for the following ingredients:

Always AVOID:

- wheat, wheat starch
- rye
- barley, brewer's yeast
- malt extract, malt vinegar, malt flavor, malt syrup

AVOID if the product is not labeled gluten free:

- oats, oat bran, oat flour
- yeast (autolyzed or extract)
- smoke flavor from barley
- natural flavor from barley

Hidden or Questionable Ingredients

Maltodextrin – can be derived from various sources, sometimes even wheat, but the finished product has minimal levels of gluten and is considered safe on a gluten free diet.

Maltodextrose – can be derived from various sources, sometimes wheat. If the source of maltodextrose is unclear, then contacting the manufacturer may help in identifying if the product is safe.

Dextrin – can be derived from various sources, sometimes wheat. Dextrin derived from wheat is not allowed on a gluten-free diet.

Dextrose – a simple sugar that is abundant in nature; it is another form of glucose and is safe to consume on a gluten free diet.

Caramel Color – can be derived from gluten-containing sources; however, the final product contains minimal levels of gluten and is considered safe on a gluten free diet.

Voluntary Advisory Statements

- “may contain wheat” and “processed in a facility/on equipment that processes wheat” are voluntary statements and NOT regulated by FDA
- Products labeled “gluten free” and with a voluntary advisory statement are safe for people with celiac disease.
- Research indicates these labels are unreliable. Many products without the advisory statement are just as likely to be unsafe for people with celiac disease as products with the advisory statement. Gluten contamination was found most often in products containing oats, and with an advisory statement, which is why oats should only be consumed when labeled “gluten free”

Medications

- Over-the-counter medications must follow the above FDA labeling rules. Read the inactive ingredients on the package; if it contains wheat, barley, or rye as any of the above noted ingredients, it is not gluten free.
- Prescription medications are NOT required to disclose allergens. Inactive ingredients should be checked and verified for gluten content.

Dietary Supplements

- Dietary supplements must follow the above FDA labeling rules
- Supplements should be labeled gluten free when possible, to avoid gluten contamination

Alcohol

- Alcoholic beverages labeled “gluten free” are safe for those with celiac disease.
- Those labeled “gluten removed” or “processed to remove gluten” are not safe for those with celiac disease.
- Wine, fruit cider (without barley malt) and distilled liquor are all gluten-free
- Beer and other malted beverages with barley are NOT safe for people with celiac disease.

Symbols and Certifications

Several independent organizations will give their stamp of approval of a product meeting the regulation of less than 20 parts per million of gluten. Food companies must apply for these designations and undergo rigorous review of their processing along with sample testing to confirm their gluten content. It is *not* necessary to purchase only products that have been verified by these independent organizations. The following symbols are commonly seen on food products.



Some information in this handout has been obtained and adapted from “Reading a Label for Gluten” handout created by Sadie Nagle, RD and Janelle Smith, RD, members of Dietitians in Gluten and Gastrointestinal Disorders (DIGID), a sub-unit of Dietitians in Medical Nutrition Therapy Dietetic Practice Group as part of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.