

About Labels



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“At first reading labels was so difficult — but now, not only do I watch out for gluten, but general nutrition as well. Reading labels has taught me to be a better consumer for my family.”

— Member

Reading Food Labels Becomes Easier

In August 2013, the FDA issued a final ruling about which foods can be labeled GF. As of 8/5/14 all manufacturers had to comply making food shopping considerably easier for people with CD. The FDA ruling set the gluten limit at 20 ppm (parts per million). A food may be labeled gluten free if it does not contain any of the following:

- A. an ingredient that is any type of wheat, rye, barley, or crossbreeds of these grains.
- B. an ingredient derived from these grains and that has not been processed to remove gluten.
- C. an ingredient derived from these grains and that has been processed to remove gluten, if it results in the food containing 20 or more parts per million (ppm) gluten.

In 2006, the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act enacted a law mandating an “allergen statement” on all products. The law requires food labels to list, in plain language, the presence of any of the following major allergens: egg, fish, milk, peanuts, shellfish, soy, tree nuts, or wheat.

Notice that the law does not require labeling for barley (or malt) or rye, which are the other grains of primary concern to celiac patients. Those grains were omitted as part of the give-and-take necessary to get a law passed that would cover the main offending allergens.

So, how do you determine if a product is safe?

First, read to see if it is labeled GF. If it is, then you know that the product contains less than 20ppm of gluten and is considered safe for people with CD.

If it is not labeled GF, then read the “allergen statement”. If wheat is listed, the product is not gluten free.

If wheat is not listed, then read the ingredient list closely. If barley, rye, or malt is listed, the product is not gluten-free.

Here are other food ingredients that usually set off alarm bells among people with celiac:

Oats – Gluten-free oats are available, though not tolerated by all celiacs. Oats in prepared foods are generally not safe. Check the package for clear labeling indicating that the oats are gluten-free and free of cross-contamination.

Malt – This is a flavoring ingredient that is usually made from barley. It may be listed as malt, malt flavoring, malt extract, or malt syrup.

Any product containing malt is not gluten-free, and must be avoided.

Maltodextrin – Good news: Maltodextrin is not related to malt. It is a sugar that is usually derived from corn, rice, or potatoes. Thus, it is gluten-free.

Modified Food Starch – Corn is the most widely used source of modified food starch. Other common

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Shouldn't I just call the manufacturer, to be sure?

Remember, a product that is wheat free is not necessarily gluten-free. If you have questions about manufacturing practices that could result in cross-contamination or concerns about any of the ingredients, a call or message to the food manufacturer may be helpful.

sources are rice or potatoes. If wheat is the source of the food starch, then wheat must be listed in the allergen statement.

Natural Flavors – These may be derived from spices, fruits, vegetables, meat, or other food sources. Natural flavors very rarely are derived from wheat, barley, or rye. Of course, if a natural flavor is derived from wheat, then wheat will be listed in the allergen statement.

Artificial Flavorings – These are blended from chemical compounds so they are gluten-free.

Natural Colors – These generally are derived from gluten-free foods such as beet power or annatto. Caramel color is the most widely used color additive. In the United States, caramel color is generally made from corn.

Color Additives – These generally are derived from chemicals and dyes and are free from food allergens.

Mono- and Di-glycerides – These are fats that are used as chemical binding agents. They do not contain gluten, though occasionally wheat may be used as a “carrier.” If so, wheat will be listed in the allergen statement.

Distilled Vinegar – Vinegar made from wine, rice, balsamic, or apple cider is risk-free. White vinegar is also safe because it is made from corn and other gluten-free grains. Malt vinegar, however, is not gluten-free because it is made from barley.

Cross Contamination Concerns:

One unintended consequence of the allergen labeling law is that many companies have added cautionary statements to their labels. The label

might say, for example, “Made in a facility that also processes wheat” or “Made on shared equipment that also processes wheat.” Some companies include the statements on food labels to protect themselves from legal action. Foods made on shared equipment or in shared facilities may be handled in ways that prevent them from getting cross-contaminated, but there may be a risk. It is wise to contact the manufacturer for more information to determine what steps are taken to avoid cross contamination in the facility.

How Can I Determine if A Product Is Gluten-Free?

Step 1: If a product is labeled gluten free, you will know that the item meets the government standard for safety.

Step 2: If it is not labeled GF, is wheat in the ingredients list or is it listed in an allergen statement beneath the ingredients list?

If Yes, Stop! This product is not gluten-free.

If No, Proceed to Step 3.

Step 3: Read the ingredients list. Is Barley, Rye, or Malt listed?*

If Yes, Stop! This product is not gluten-free.

If No, The ingredients in this product are gluten-free and it is safe for most** celiacs to eat.

*People with celiac disease are advised to consult with their physician about including oats in their diet.

** Please review the concern about cross-contamination in manufactured foods before you decide to consume the product.