

A Quick Guide to Wheat



The key reason wheat can be an issue for people is that it contains gluten. Gluten refers to the storage proteins found in all grains. It is what gives bread its airy, fluffy texture and dough its sticky consistency. The type of gluten found in wheat can be particularly problematic for people. In part this might be because in this part of the world we have such a wheat-heavy diet. You find it not just in the obvious things, such as bread, pasta, cakes, biscuits and breakfast cereals, but also in many processed foods, such as soups, sauces and sweets, which can contain wheat flour as a filler.

Symptoms of wheat sensitivity range from mild bloating to significant gastrointestinal difficulties. The increased incidence of this issue broadly coincides with the industrialisation of baking, leaving many to draw the conclusion that the problem is not necessarily in the wheat itself, but in how it is processed.

Anecdotally, there is evidence that reducing or removing wheat from the diet can have beneficial effects for people who suffer with bloating and gastrointestinal discomfort. Sometimes it's necessary to go one step further and take out all gluten grains, but it's easier to start with wheat.

Alternative Grains to Wheat

There are many alternative grains to wheat, including rice, rye, barley, buckwheat, millet, amaranth and quinoa. However, part of taking wheat out of your diet is realising that you don't have to eat grains everyday! Potatoes, sweet potatoes and other starchy veg are a great alternative, as is having meals with veg and protein and leaving out the grains. But I realise grain products do help keep things interesting, and there is nothing inherently wrong with eating grains as part of a balanced diet. So here are some ideas below to get you started.

Alternative Bread and Flour

- **Rye** - Rye bread is readily available in shops these days and is a fantastic alternative to wheat. It has a rich flavour and good "bread like" consistency. Do check the label to make sure it isn't a mix of rye and wheat flour.
- **Spelt** - Although an ancient form of wheat, it hasn't been so tainted by intensive breeding and contains a high amount of natural yeasts and bacteria, so many who struggle with digesting modern wheat find spelt much easier. Along with rye, it is one of the most

common alternatives you find to wheat bread. It looks and performs much like ordinary wheat flour, although does tend to have a slightly denser flavour.

- **Other flours** - Chickpea, millet, potato, tapioca, buckwheat, almond, cassava, quinoa and buckwheat.



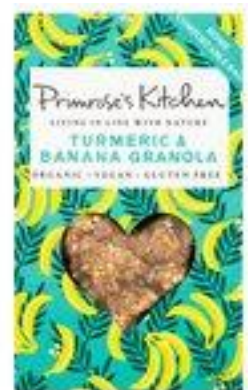
Alternative Pastas and Noodles

For wheat-free pasta you're best off looking in the gluten-free section of large supermarkets as this will automatically mean wheat-free, or go to your local health food shop, where you'll find a number of wheat-free pasta and noodle alternatives (again, as long as it's labelled as gluten-free then it's fine). Go for brown rice, quinoa and spelt pastas. Try quinoa or

buckwheat noodles – and if you can find the King Soba range, they have some amazing alternatives, including sweet potato noodles.

Alternative Breakfast Cereals

Supermarkets and health food shops stock breakfast cereals which do not contain wheat. Muesli can be a good place to start – and are much more nutritious than most cereals. Do check to make sure they don't add refined sugar. Dorset Cereals now do gluten-free options and Primrose Kitchen is also a good range if you can find it (so far I've only seen it in Waitrose, health food shops or online).



Alternative Cakes and Biscuits

Gluten-free varieties will all be wheat-free, but many of these are crammed with sugar. If possible, aim for healthier snacks such as fruit and nuts or hummus and crudités. Nakd bars are also a good alternative or 9 Bars, both of which are easily found in most big supermarkets.



Eating Out

You won't necessarily see foods advertised as wheat-free, but you will find plenty of gluten-free options, including gluten-free pizza and pasta in well-known chains. If in doubt ask! It is such a common request now that most places are used to providing people with good alternatives.

Sources and further information: www.shipton-mill.com, www.mayoclinic.com