

Q. Does 'gluten-free' mean there is no gluten?

A. Although the term implies there is no gluten at all, manufacturing gluten-free food is difficult in practice. Research has shown that people with coeliac disease are able to safely eat a very small amount of gluten. As a result, very low levels of gluten (no more than 20 parts of gluten per million) are allowed in products that are labelled 'gluten-free'.

Q. Is it safe for me to eat a food described as 'very low gluten'?

A. The majority of coeliacs will be able to eat some food described in this way. But you should speak to your dietitian or healthcare professional to find out whether, or how often, you can eat them.

Q. What is the difference between 'gluten-free' and 'no gluten-containing ingredients'?

A. 'Gluten-free' can only be used on food that has 20 parts of gluten per million or less. Although food labelled with the phrase 'no gluten-containing ingredients' doesn't intentionally contain these ingredients (for example potato salad or tomato soup), it may contain some gluten, as a result of coming into contact with other food that does contain gluten.

Q. Why do some foods labelled as 'gluten-free' or 'very low gluten' have cereals containing gluten in the ingredients list?

A. If a gluten-containing ingredient has been added to a product, it must be included in the ingredients list. But if the levels are very low, it may still meet the requirements to be labelled 'gluten-free' or 'very low gluten'. For example, malt extract prepared from barley is often used to flavour breakfast cereals, but if the levels used are low, these cereals can be marked as 'gluten-free' and are suitable for people with coeliac disease.

Q. Can I still eat the same food?

A. The new rules mean that food must meet stricter levels to be labelled as 'gluten-free', so some of the 'gluten-free' food that you ate before may not meet the new requirements. But sometimes, even if they haven't changed their processes, businesses may choose not to make a 'gluten-free' claim anymore because they haven't carried out the testing needed to be sure that the claim is accurate.

Q. Is it safe for people with coeliac disease to eat products labelled as 'wheat-free'?

A. Products labelled as 'wheat-free' aren't the same as those labelled 'gluten-free' or 'very low gluten'. Wheat-free products may contain other cereals, such as rye or barley, so these won't be suitable for someone with coeliac disease, unless they are also labelled 'gluten-free' or 'very low gluten'.

Q. Is it safe for people who are allergic or intolerant to wheat to eat products labelled as 'gluten-free' or 'very low gluten'?

A. 'Gluten-free' products and 'very low gluten' products may still contain other proteins found in wheat (albumins, globulins and starch granule proteins), so these might not be suitable for people who are intolerant or allergic to wheat.