

## WHERE CAN I GET SUPPORT AND DIETARY ADVICE?

### WHAT IS COELIAC DISEASE?

Coeliac disease isn't an allergy or an intolerance to gluten, it is an autoimmune condition. In cases of coeliac disease, the immune system mistakes substances found inside gluten as a threat to the body and attacks them. This damages the surface of the small bowel (intestines), disrupting the body's ability to absorb nutrients from food.

Eating foods containing gluten can trigger a range of symptoms, such as diarrhoea, bloating and flatulence, abdominal pain, weight loss, and feeling tired all the time. Although some patients may not experience any symptoms at all.

### TREATING COELIAC DISEASE

There is no cure for coeliac disease, but switching to a gluten-free diet should help control symptoms and prevent the long-term consequences of the disease.

Gluten is a protein found in three types of cereal - wheat, barley and rye. Gluten is found in any food that contains the above cereals, for example, pasta, cakes, breakfast cereals, most types of bread, certain types of sauces and most beers. Due to farming methods oats also often contain gluten.

Even very small amounts of gluten can be damaging to people with coeliac disease. It is therefore important to take sensible steps to avoid cross contamination. For example by using separate bread boards and toasters and by preventing breadcrumbs from getting into condiments.

The **Coeliac UK** website at [www.coeliac.org.uk/gluten-free-diet-and-lifestyle/gf-diet/](http://www.coeliac.org.uk/gluten-free-diet-and-lifestyle/gf-diet/) contains a very useful food and drink directory, available free to members and for £10 when sold. The website also contains lots of useful information on how to follow a gluten-free diet, including advice about shopping and reading food labels, cooking and baking, eating out, travelling and specific advice for children and for those eating on a budget.

There are two **smartphone apps** from Coeliac UK available:

- **Gluten Free Food Checker** - search thousands of food products suitable for your GF diet, includes a barcode scanner and lists of ingredients and nutritional information for products.
- **Gluten-free on the Move** - access to the Food and Drink Directory, a food label guide and eating out tips and venues.

Both apps are available in the App Store for iOS devices and in the Google Play Store for Android devices. Use of these apps however should never replace carefully checking food packaging for gluten containing ingredients.

For enquiries relating to the content of this leaflet please contact the Croydon CCG Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0800 456 1517 (Monday to Friday 9am-5pm) or email [SLCSU.Complaints@nhs.net](mailto:SLCSU.Complaints@nhs.net)

# GLUTEN FREE FOODS

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS



This leaflet explains the changes to the availability of gluten free food products on NHS prescription in Croydon.

## WHY HAS CROYDON CCG STOPPED PRESCRIBING GLUTEN FREE FOOD PRODUCTS ON PRESCRIPTION?

Croydon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) no longer supports the routine prescribing of gluten free (GF) foods to all patients.

Croydon CCG is currently facing a substantial financial challenge. We must focus our resources on the most important health services and reduce our spending in some areas of our health budget.

The decision to stop routinely prescribing GF foods was made because:

- GF foods are now much more widely available with increased quality and variety both online and in-store.
- All major supermarkets and many other retailers, commonly stock gluten-free foods as well as other special diet alternatives, at a far lower cost to the public than if it was provided by the NHS.
- It is possible to eat a healthy balanced GF diet without the need for specialist dietary foods as other low cost naturally GF foods such as rice and potatoes are widely available.
- Improved food labelling now means people are able to see whether ordinary food products are free from gluten and can be safely eaten.

## WHERE CAN PATIENTS FIND GLUTEN FREE FOODS LOCALLY?

From our research we are confident that patients will be able to find GF foods in a wide range of places:

- **Medium and large supermarkets** - These stores often have large 'Free-from' sections with a wide range of GF foods at affordable prices. Stores include Asda, Morrisons, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Waitrose and M&S Food.
- **Smaller local convenience stores** - Some shops such as Spar, Londis & Budgens are now stocking a small range of GF foods.
- **Local pharmacies** - patients can order the GF foods they would have previously obtained on an NHS prescription through their local community pharmacy without the need for a prescription, however prices can vary between different pharmacies. Brands such as Juvela® and Glutafin® are only available through this route.
- **Online** - many gluten free foods are available directly through manufacturers websites online or even through retailers such as Amazon.

## WHAT IF PATIENTS CAN'T AFFORD TO PAY FOR GLUTEN FREE SUBSTITUTE FOODS?

It is recognised that the price of GF products is more expensive than non-GF products but the price difference is not as wide as it once was. This is thought to be due to the increasing demand for such products, with more people choosing to follow a GF diet and greater engagement from supermarkets and manufacturers in this sector.

In addition to GF substitute foods there are also many naturally gluten free foods such as rice and potatoes, which are widely available at low cost.

Improved food labelling also now means people are able to easily see whether ordinary food products are free from gluten and can be safely eaten, reducing the need to purchase specialist GF items.

## WHAT IF PATIENTS DECIDE TO STOP FOLLOWING A GLUTEN FREE DIET?

If a patient has been diagnosed with coeliac disease, they must continue to follow a strict gluten free diet.

We encourage patients to consume as many naturally gluten free foods as possible rather than specialist products that have been manufactured to be gluten free.

It remains important to eat healthily and following the **Eatwell Plate Model** will ensure you are eating a well balanced diet.

Longer, healthier lives for all the people in Croydon

