

Gluten Free in the SCA—a Reference for Cooks and Allergic Persons Alike

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Which grains have gluten in them?

The gluten protein is found in wheat, spelt, rye, barley, farro, kamut and semolina.

Oats should be Gluten free! There is a lot of cross-contamination during processing as most factories that process oats also process spelt, wheat, rye etc... Wheat flour can remain in the air for up to 24 hours! Look for Oats that are certified Gluten-free.

Why do people need to be gluten-free? What is celiac disease? What is gluten-sensitivity?

Celiac disease is an autoimmune digestive disease that damages the villi of the small intestine and interferes with absorption of nutrients from food. What does this mean? Essentially the body is attacking itself every time a person with celiac consumes gluten.

Celiac disease is triggered by consumption of the protein called gluten, which is found in wheat, barley and rye. When people with celiac disease eat foods containing gluten, their immune system responds by damaging the finger-like villi of the small intestine. When the villi become damaged, the body is unable to absorb nutrients into the bloodstream, which can lead to malnourishment. Left untreated, people with celiac disease can develop further complications such as other autoimmune diseases, osteoporosis, thyroid disease, and cancer.

There are more than 300 symptoms of celiac disease, and symptoms may vary among different people. One person might have diarrhea and abdominal pain, while another person has irritability or depression. Some patients develop celiac symptoms early in life, while others feel healthy far into adulthood. Some people with celiac disease have no signs or symptoms.

Non-celiac gluten sensitivity shares many symptoms with celiac disease. However, according to a collaborative report published by Sapone et al. (2012), individuals with non-celiac gluten sensitivity have a prevalence of extraintestinal or non-GI symptoms, such as headache, “foggy mind,” joint pain, and numbness in the legs, arms or fingers. Symptoms typically appear hours or days after gluten has been ingested, a response typical for innate immune conditions like non-celiac gluten sensitivity. (Source: National Foundation for Celiac Awareness website)

KITCHEN SETUP AND SAFETY

Metal Pans, metal utensils—best, can be thoroughly cleaned. If metal & glass, make sure joins are cleaned very well.

Cast Iron—Iron is porous, so food particles are trapped. Can be cleaned by being run through a self-cleaning oven cycle, and re-seasoned, then dedicated to gluten free cooking.

Nonstick coated pans, plastic dishes, non-stick & plastic utensils, silicone utensils—cannot be used if scratched, or if plastic has melted, as food particles can hide there, and plastic will leach into cooked foods. Also, plastic to metal joins, or silicone to metal joins may trap food particles.

Toasters, Stand Mixers, Hand Mixers, Sifters—best to replace these if they have ever been used for “gluten” cooking, as the inner workings cannot be cleaned.

Pizza stones—same as Cast Iron—porous, but can be thoroughly cleaned as above.

Colanders—the jury is out as to whether these can be cleaned or not. Best to dedicate one totally GF. In our shared kitchen, we use a stiff brush for thorough cleaning, and run them through the dishwasher periodically. I do not use them at all for cross-allergy friendly cooking.

Wooden, Bamboo—cannot be cleaned once used with gluten. Best to have dedicated utensils if shared kitchen.

Have dedicated GF prep areas. That means no shared utensils, cutting boards, knives or even bowls of pre-cut ingredients. I find it is best to stage when I am cross-allergy cooking—sometimes I cook on entirely different days so I can clean most thoroughly.

NOTES ABOUT INGREDIENTS

*Remember that many GF people are also allergic to corn and/or potato.

Herbs and Spices—make sure there is no filler or anticaking agent. Many companies use wheat flour for this. Penzeys, McCormicks and Spice Islands are my fave brands, but you still need to read the labels.

Baking Powder and Confectioners Sugar—use a gluten-free brand. Avoid these if you have a corn-allergic person. There are recipes to make your own corn-free ones. I have them, as my sister is allergic to gluten and corn.

Thickeners for sauces/gravies: Arrowroot, Bean Flour, Tapioca Flour, Rice Flour, Oat Flour, Sweet Potato Flour

Read the ingredients listing and the Allergen notifications on all GF items you purchase. If an item is marked GF, or the ingredients list is devoid of gluten, but the Allergen warning states: “Manufactured in a facility that processes wheat” then it is NOT safe for a GF/Celiac person. Cross contamination is our enemy. There is a reason ingredients are measured in the parts-per-million. There are people who react at those levels.

Here is my personal cross-contamination story:

I have been a fan of marshmallow peeps as long as I can remember. Even after I changed my diet to GF and DF (CF), I could still eat peeps. Last year, I purchased my packages at the beginning of the Easter season, and happily settled on the couch to have some as an afternoon snack. Within 20 minutes, I had a sneezing, eye-watering, full on allergic fit, which indicates I have ingested dairy. I quickly went through my day's eating—did I eat something different or new? I had not.

I went upstairs to the peeps packaging, and as I read the ingredients listing, I saw something new. There was a Allergen Warning for Milk on the package. I re-read the ingredients, and saw no milk or derivatives. I was confused, so I contacted the company to ask why there was a new warning on the package.

Imagine my surprise when my email query yielded a callback from the factory representative. She wanted to discuss my reaction in detail, because the only thing that had changed was that the peeps line had added a new product to their line, Milk Chocolate covered peeps, which ran on the same equipment as regular peeps. They had added the Allergen warning as the equipment was now shared, and could not be guaranteed milk free. Nobody else had contacted the company about allergic reactions, and the representative was intrigued that I could be so sensitive to cross contamination.

I have since had the same issue with other items processed on shared equipment. I cannot eat a trail mix blend that Wegmans makes...there are no components that I am allergic to, but it is processed on shared equipment with wheat...and yep...you got it...I reacted in a “run to the bathroom NOW” way. Rite-Aid makes circus peanuts that they carefully mark GF, but once again, shared equipment is the bane, and I react.

Communicating with the Head Cook

1. Contact the head cook (and only the head cook) as far ahead as possible. Consider their job: Cooking for 50-150 or more; coordinating a series of courses; cooking within a time period or region. Most cooks start planning their menu **months** in advance. You need to contact them minimum of 2-4 weeks prior to the feast date. If they then direct you to communicate with another staff member of their team, do so. Otherwise, all communication should be with the head cook.
2. Not all cooks can accommodate allergies. Some can avoid certain ingredients, but that is not the same as avoiding cross-contamination and using proper GF certified ingredients to make a safe GF dish. It is always up to the cook to determine if he/she and their team can safely cook GF dishes as part of the feast. Respect this. Since you are contacting them ahead of time, if they must decline, thank them for their time and go to your plan B. I have attended feasts where I ate off-board and Artemius ate on-board and we were at different tables. Sometimes I chose to serve instead, and ate before feast or during dessert.
3. When a cook says they can accommodate GF...thank them heartily. This is a gift. Remember that you may still need to bring some supplemental foods to round out your meal, depending on the cuisine. The purpose of contacting the cook ahead of time is to open/facilitate communication about the meal, courses and ingredients list...not to have a catered meal geared to your allergies. At this point, it is good to ask when you can have an ingredients listing so you can determine which dishes will be safe for you. Ultimately, your allergy and your safe eating is your responsibility. I have found that many cooks will try to change/augment or recreate a dish if they have time and the budget to plan doing so ahead of time.
4. If you find that you will be bringing supplemental food items, you can tell the head cook if you wish to share with others who might be GF. I often bring breads and desserts that I can eat, and share them. I have also contributed specialty flours or GF breadcrumbs to the feast if the cook was changing a dish to make it universally safe. I understand that you are paying for feast AND paying for the items you bring, but that cook spent time and resources to accommodate you as much as possible, even if it meant giving an ingredients list ahead of time. Sharing is one of the things that makes the SCA, and feasting together wonderful.
5. Finally, if you have to cancel, please contact the cook as well as the tollner. Give as much notice as possible and thank them again if they were making allowances for GF courses.

Resources I recommend:

Living Without Magazine and website www.livingwithout.com

www.celiaccentral.org

www.buffaloglutenfree.org

Local health food stores

Nature Tyme

Green Planet Grocery

My cookbook collection:

You Won't Believe It Is Gluten-Free! By Robin Ryberg

*This is one of my top faves—it has multiple recipes for items, using only one GF flour. She takes a very scientific approach and the recipes are reliable.

Cooking For Isaiah by Silvana Nardone

*This cookbook is geared towards gluten-free and casein-free, so you can imagine how much I use it. Her standard flour blend is one of my faves, and she has a pizza dough recipe that is terrific.

Cooking Free by Carol Fenster, Ph D

*Carol is a regular contributor to Living Without magazine. This cookbook gave me salad dressing recipes, so I could make a “ranch” dressing to dip my wings into! Many recipes fit “across the board” allergy friendly.

The Gluten-Free Almond Flour Cookbook by Elena Amsterdam

The Gluten-Free Asian Kitchen by Laura B. Russell

The Gluten-Free Bible (no author listed)

*This cookbook gave me the GF Blend ratio listed below

GF Flour blending guide (From “The Gluten Free Bible”)

2 parts grain flour

2 parts starch

1 part protein flour

I have many recipes that I have printed off the internet websites. Please contact me to set up an appointment to peruse my library. I am also happy to answer technical cooking questions and help you with making substitutions to adapt your favorite recipes.

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