

Step-by-Step Guide to Reading Gluten-Free Labels

1

Consider naturally gluten-free foods.

Naturally gluten-free foods (like bottled water, carrots, unflavored rice) may or may not necessarily be labeled gluten-free. This does not mean that these products contain gluten or have come in contact with gluten. It is not necessary to buy only naturally gluten free foods that are labeled gluten-free unless you are purchasing grains or flours (which carry a higher risk).

2

Look for gluten-free declaration.

After August 2014, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) states that manufacturers may use the term “gluten-free” if the product contains less than 20 ppm gluten. Third-party certification can help provide reassurance. (Making a gluten-free claim is voluntary, foods not labeled gluten-free do not necessarily contain gluten.)

3

Read ingredients statements.

Look for wheat, rye, barley, oats and their derivatives, like (barley) malt, for example. Understand which products are at the highest risk for cross-contact with gluten. Flours and grains, for example, have high levels of contact with gluten, so consumers should purchase flours and grains specifically labeled gluten-free. Mandatory FDA allergen labeling laws require wheat to be listed on a product label, but rye and barley are not. Oats do not contain gluten, but are also at high risk for cross-contact with gluten-containing grains. If you choose to eat oats, choose oats labeled or certified gluten-free.

4

Look for hidden sources of gluten.

Understand which ingredients are code for gluten. Semolina, spelt, and durum are all forms of wheat. Barley is commonly found as malt. FDA regulation requires most packaged foods to clearly label wheat (a major food allergen), however rye and barley do not have to appear in plain language on the label. USDA-regulated products and medications don't have to call out wheat derivatives on the ingredients list. (Note: The USDA estimates that 80-90% of foods under their jurisdiction voluntarily comply with this labeling).

5

Call the manufacturer or visit the manufacturer's website for verification.

Most packaged products include a phone number to reach the manufacturer right on the packaging. If you call the manufacturer to verify gluten-free status, they may ask you for the SKU number, which is the unique number that is underneath the scanner pattern. Additionally, manufacturer websites will often contain comprehensive lists of which products are gluten-free.

6

Avoid products with confusing labeling.

It's possible that some products could contain wheat starch and still be considered gluten-free (the starch from the wheat plant can be isolated from the grain). Some manufacturers use a voluntary allergen warning when wheat is used in the same plant. Note that when proper manufacturing and testing processes are in place, it is possible to produce a safe gluten-free product in the same plant, and even sometimes on the same equipment, as gluten-containing products.

7

When in doubt, leave it out.

Approximately 70% of people with celiac disease continue to experience symptoms from inadvertent gluten exposure. If you are unsure about an ingredient or product label, find an alternative.



For more information:

www.beyondceliac.org/gettingstarted
www.beyondceliac.org/webinars/archive

This guide was created in collaboration with Amy Jones, RD, LDN.

