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## Gluten-Free Dining Out: Is it Safe?



Pam Cureton

**Dining out is one of life's simple pleasures that most of us take for granted. However, for your patient with celiac disease, it can be an overwhelming task. The simple act of ordering off the menu becomes a complex challenge to achieve a safe, gluten-free meal. Some individuals on the gluten-free diet are fearful of dining occasions and worry that the outing may leave them ill with reoccurring celiac symptoms. Some dread the challenge of communicating their dietary restriction to the waiter, manager, or chef. Patients do not feel confident in their abilities to detect sources of gluten in restaurant food and sources of possible contamination. Given the right tools and educational support, their health care providers can turn dread into delight. Giving the patient confidence to eat away from home will increase his or her quality of life and improve compliance with the gluten-free diet.**

### INTRODUCTION

According to the 2006 National Restaurant Association Industry Fact Sheet, restaurants will provide more than 70 billion meals and snack occasions in 2006. On a typical day in the U.S., 130 million individuals will be foodservice patrons. As income increases, consumers eat away from home more frequently and spend a greater proportion of their food dollar on meals away from home. The average American eats out approximately 4.2 meals/week. Industry sales projection for the year 2006 is \$511 billion (1).

Patients with celiac disease will be among those 130 million patrons, but will have the additional chal-

lenge of complying with their gluten-free diet (GFD) while enjoying a meal at a restaurant. Not only must the foods be gluten-free, but they must also be free from *contamination* or contact from gluten containing foods. The patient has invested many hours learning about their dietary needs and must convey these needs to a restaurant worker in order to successfully receive a gluten-free meal away from home. For more detailed information on the GFD, see "The Celiac Diet" Series #1, in *Practical Gastroenterology*, September 2006.

In a survey of 2,681 Canadian adults with celiac disease, 54% reported avoiding restaurants. Included in the survey was a question that asked respondents to select two items from the questionnaire that would improve their quality of life. Almost half (49%) selected gluten-free choices on restaurant menus (2). A survey of

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**Table 1**  
**Examples of Restaurants with Gluten-free Menus**

<i>Restaurant</i>	<i>Web Site</i>
Biaggi's Ristorante Italiano	<a href="http://www.biaggis.com/restaurants.htm">http://www.biaggis.com/restaurants.htm</a>
Bonefish Grill	<a href="http://www.bonefishgrill.com/pdf/bfg_menu_gf.pdf">http://www.bonefishgrill.com/pdf/bfg_menu_gf.pdf</a>
Boston Market	<a href="http://www.bostonmarket.com/restaurant?page=nutritionSub&amp;id=1&amp;name=Make%20Your%20Meal">http://www.bostonmarket.com/restaurant?page=nutritionSub&amp;id=1&amp;name=Make%20Your%20Meal</a>
Carrabba's Italian Grill	<a href="http://www.carrabbas.com/menu/pdf/GFmenu.pdf">www.carrabbas.com/menu/pdf/GFmenu.pdf</a>
Cheeseburger in Paradise	<a href="http://www.cheeseburgerinparadise.com/pdf/Gluten-Free-ToGo-Menu.pdf">http://www.cheeseburgerinparadise.com/pdf/Gluten-Free-ToGo-Menu.pdf</a>
Chick-fil-A	<a href="http://www.chick-fil-a.com/gluten.asp">http://www.chick-fil-a.com/gluten.asp</a>
Coldstone Creamery	<a href="http://www.coldstonecreamery.com/images/news/REF004_052006_Allergen_Chart_473.pdf">http://www.coldstonecreamery.com/images/news/REF004_052006_Allergen_Chart_473.pdf</a>
Dennys	<a href="http://www.dennys.com/en/page.asp?PID=1&amp;ID=23">http://www.dennys.com/en/page.asp?PID=1&amp;ID=23</a>
DQ	<a href="http://www.dairyqueen.com/enUS/Menus+and+Nutrition/Special+Dietary+Needs/GlutenFree+Products.htm">http://www.dairyqueen.com/enUS/Menus+and+Nutrition/Special+Dietary+Needs/GlutenFree+Products.htm</a>
First Watch	<a href="http://www.firstwatch.com/pages/menus_glutenfree.html">http://www.firstwatch.com/pages/menus_glutenfree.html</a>
Fleming's Steakhouse	<a href="http://www.flemingssteakhouse.com/menu_nutrition.htm#glutenfree">http://www.flemingssteakhouse.com/menu_nutrition.htm#glutenfree</a>
Jamba Juice	<a href="http://www.jambajuice.com/what/faq.html">http://www.jambajuice.com/what/faq.html</a>
Legal Seafoods	<a href="http://www.legalseafoods.com/index.cfm/pid/13264/page/Restaurant-Sample-Menus">www.legalseafoods.com/index.cfm/pid/13264/page/Restaurant-Sample-Menus</a>
McDonald's	<a href="http://www.mcdonalds.com">www.mcdonalds.com</a>
Mitchell's Fish Market	<a href="http://www.cameronmitchell.com/restaurants/restaurantinformation/menu.cfm?rid=27&amp;showmenu=206">www.cameronmitchell.com/restaurants/restaurantinformation/menu.cfm?rid=27&amp;showmenu=206</a>
Outback Steakhouse	<a href="http://www.outback.com/ourmenu/pdf/glutenfree.pdf">www.outback.com/ourmenu/pdf/glutenfree.pdf</a>
Pei Wei Asian Diner	<a href="http://www.peiwei.com/glutenfreeMenu.jsp">http://www.peiwei.com/glutenfreeMenu.jsp</a>
PF Chang's China Bistro	<a href="http://www.pfchangs.com/cuisine/menu_spec.jsp">www.pfchangs.com/cuisine/menu_spec.jsp</a>
Subway	<a href="http://www.subway.com/applications/NutritionInfo/index.aspx">http://www.subway.com/applications/NutritionInfo/index.aspx</a>
Taco Del Mar	<a href="http://www.tacodelmar.com/food/gluten.html">http://www.tacodelmar.com/food/gluten.html</a>
Wendy's	<a href="http://www.wendys.com/food/pdf/us/gluten_free_list.pdf">http://www.wendys.com/food/pdf/us/gluten_free_list.pdf</a>
Z' Tejas	<a href="http://www.ztejas.com/menu_gluten.php?section=gluten">http://www.ztejas.com/menu_gluten.php?section=gluten</a>

253 adults in the U.S. revealed that 86% of those adhering to a GFD felt a negative impact on eating out (3). In addition, Gluten-free Living surveyed their readership and 5% will not eat outside their home (4).

The National Restaurant Association has seen an increase in the awareness of celiac disease in the past two years and continues to work to educate restaurants and their employees on food allergens and intolerances. The Association has developed training guides to educate restaurants on food safety, food allergens and intolerances. More restaurants are offering gluten-free menus (for a partial list of restaurants see Table 1). Shelia Cohn, R.D., L.D. Director, Nutrition Policy

Health and Safety Regulatory Affairs for the National Restaurant Association states that it is key for a guest to explain to their server their dietary restriction or intolerance. She goes on to say, "The Association tells their restaurants to be up front about ingredients and to do everything they can to ensure that a guest receives the proper meal. They encourage the guest to speak to the manager of the restaurant who will then let the staff in the back of the house (kitchen) know what should be avoided in food preparation. The Association emphasizes how important it is that they read the ingredients of each item, and work with the guest to find the best meal for them. They teach them about using "clean"

*Notes*

Most locations have GF menu  
 GF menu  
 List of ingredients of menu items  
 GF menu  
 GF menu  
 List of GF items on website  
 List of GF items on website  
  
 List of GF items on website  
 GF menu  
  
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 List of GF items on website  
 List of GF items on website

(void of the ingredients in question) working surfaces and utensils and checking back with diners after the meal has been served. It is important that a guest feel comfortable making these special requests.”

When asked, *When you introduce your students to gluten-free baking for the first time, what key points do you initially cover?*,” Chef Richard Coppedge, Professor in Baking and Pastry at the Culinary Institute of America, responded

*“The ingredients found in gluten-free products are only half the battle; the way the food is prepared must also be considered. Often special utensils and workspaces*

*must be used to ensure that there is no contamination of the product. To avoid contamination when producing gluten-free products, it is essential to do a thorough cleaning of all surfaces to allow any dust to settle, or use a separate room and/or equipment devoted to this function. A good way to remember these precautionary measures are the ‘4 C’s of Gluten-Free Baking’*

- *Content,*
- *Contact,*
- *Contamination, and*
- *Communication.*

*Ideally, customers with Celiac Disease will call ahead to let chefs know they are coming so that they can properly accommodate their specific dietary needs (5).”*

**FIRST THINGS FIRST**

Before your patient attempts to order their meal from a restaurant, they must be comfortable with the basics of the GFD. It is important to refer them to a knowledgeable dietitian to provide a reliable, GF diet education. They should be familiar with the grains that must be avoided and what foods contain these grains. The patient needs to be familiar with the hidden sources of gluten and where possible contamination may occur. Encourage patients to read labels on prepared foods and to further educate themselves by reading cookbooks, watching cooking shows, and asking cooks about how dishes are commonly prepared.

The mother of one 12-year old patient reported that he had some discomfort after eating in a restaurant. Mom asked him what he ordered and his reply was “I just had the roast beef with mashed potatoes and gravy.” Mom was horrified that he had eaten the gravy and when she asked him why, he replied, “I eat gravy at home all the time.” He had no idea that his mother made the gravy from cornstarch versus the usual wheat flour.

**NEW LABELING LAWS MAY HELP**

The Food Allergen and Consumer Protection Act took effect on January 1, 2006. This law states that if a manufacturer uses any of the top eight allergens (milk, egg, soybean, tree nuts, peanut, shell fish, fish, and wheat) the ingredient must be identified on the label in plain

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**Table 2  
Resources for Dining Out and Dining Cards**

<i>Name of Resource</i>	<i>Author/Provider/Web Site</i>
GIG Gluten Intolerance Group	www.gluten.net; (206) 246-6652
Bob and Ruth's Gluten-Free Dining & Travel Club	www.bobandruths.com; (410) 486-0292
Gluten Free on the go	www.gluten-free-onthego.com
Living Gluten-Free for Dummies	Danna Korn; www.dummies.com
The Gluten-Free Bible	Jax Peters Lowell; www.henryholt.com
Good Health Publishing	www.goodhealthpublishing.com
Gluten-Free Restaurant Awareness Program	Participating restaurants prepare GF menu items www.glutenfreerestaurants.org
Waiter, is There Wheat in my Soup? The Official Guide to Dining Out, Shopping, and Traveling Gluten-Free and Allergen-Free	LynnRae Ries; www.whatnowheat.com
Let's Eat Out! Your Passport to Living Gluten and Allergy Free <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-Lingual Phrase Passport</li> <li>• Pocket-Size Cuisine Passports</li> </ul>	<i>Passport Let's Eat Out!</i> series by Kim Koeller and Robert La France; www.glutenfreepassport.com; (312) 952-4900 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pocket-size guide providing translations for common phrases related to dining out with food allergies and intolerances (French, German, Italian, and Spanish)</li> <li>• Pocket-size guides to French and Italian cuisine, Chinese, Indian, and Thai cuisine, and American steak, seafood, and Mexican cuisine.</li> </ul>
The Essential Gluten-Free Restaurant Guide	Triumph Dining; www.triumphdining.com
Triumph Dining Cards	Dining cards for American, Chinese, French, Greek, Indian, Italian, Japanese, Mexican, Thai, and Vietnamese cuisines. www.triumphdining.com; (609) 564-0445
Celiac Chicks	Provides restaurant suggestions and reviews www.celiacchicks.com

English. Although the law does not apply to the *foods* served in restaurants, it applies to the packaged ingredients used by that restaurant. The chef can read the labels of the pre-made mashed potatoes or a marinade to see if wheat has been used. It is important to also remember that the new law only includes wheat, *not* barley or rye. However, these ingredients are rarely “hidden” as wheat can be, therefore less problematic to consumers.

This new law has its down side as it has caused problems for both consumers and restaurants as they work to identify sources of gluten. McDonald’s was one of the first to be affected by the new law in its attempt to inform the public about the ingredients used

in their French fries. The news that wheat and milk were in the flavoring oil used in the preparation of fries made front-page news and national media attention. Previously considered safe for people with celiac disease, the news was devastating to soccer moms that needed a quick meal or snack while on the go for their child with celiac disease. The celiac community was stunned and upset to the point of class action lawsuits (6). McDonalds turned to the University of Nebraska’s Food Allergy Research and Resource Program to test the fries for wheat protein in the finished product and no detectable gluten was found. Their website no longer lists their French fries as safe but directs you to

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**Table 3**  
**Menu Terms That May Mean Wheat is Present**

Au Gratin	French term referring to a browned topping of bread crumbs and/or grated cheese
Bechamel	White sauce made by thickening milk with a roux
Beurre Manie	Butter and flour mixture used to thicken sauces
Cordon bleu	Dish including chicken or veal and ham and cheese that is breaded and sautéed
Encrusted	May use flour or bread crumbs to bind ingredients to food item
Dust	Lightly sprinkled with dry ingredient such as flour
Farfel	A soup garnish made of minced noodle dough
Fricassee	A stew of meat or poultry in gravy, usually thicken with flour
Fritter	Food dipped into or combined with batter and fried
Gnocchi	Dumplings made from a paste of flour or potatoes and egg—"pillow" shaped dumplings made from flour
Pan Gravy	Sauce made from meat juices, often thickened with flour
Marinade	May contain soy sauce
Meuniere	Dusted with flour and sautéed in butter
Raspings	Very finely grated stale bread
Roux	Paste of butter and flour that is used to thicken sauces and soups
Scallopini	Thin sliced meat cooked in small amount of fat till tender or coated with flour and fried
Soy sauce	A sauce made from fermented soybeans and sometimes roasted wheat or barley
Teriyaki sauce	Contains soy sauce
Tempura	Shrimp, seafood and vegetables battered and fried in a flour-based batter
Veloute	Sauce thickened with flour (roux) often used as a base for soups, stews and fricassee
Welsh Rarebit	Cheese sauce made with ale or beer and served over toast or crackers

more information on the product to let the consumer decide on their safety.

### The Most Important First Step: Identify Yourself

The single most important piece of advice to give your patients is to be sure they identify themselves as someone needing a special diet. Anxiety about speaking up about food allergies/intolerances is the most common reason people have allergic reactions when dining out (7). This is often difficult for the shy, quiet patient or a teenager who does not want to call attention to him or her self. Even if the patient thinks they can choose gluten-free foods on their own, they may not be aware of a chef's secret recipe or unusual uses of wheat flour. For example, a popular pancake house puts pancake

batter into their omelets. Another example is the use of wheat and butter to achieve the important mouth-feel of the dishes served. Chefs use wheat and butter to transfer flavor and hold it on the palate longer. The thicker the food, the longer the flavor stays on the palate and the more flavor is enjoyed. The flour and butter mixture, called *Beurre Manie*, is sometimes kept on hand and added to any sauce or soup to thicken it quickly, however, this is not as commonly used as it once was. Calling the restaurant ahead of time to discuss the menu as well as dining out at non-peak hours is also helpful.

Help patients determine an approach to identifying themselves. Use such phrases as: "*I am on a medically required diet. I have a severe reaction to wheat, or I have an allergy to wheat.*" Avoid the use of the terms "autoimmune disease," celiac disease and "gluten" as

these are terms not easily understood by the average restaurant server and the message may not get back to the chef.

The use of a dining card, especially made for people with CD, may also help convey the message if the person is unsure of what to say. The dining cards are available from several different sources (Table 2) and are available in different languages.

### ASK MORE QUESTIONS

Once your patient has established the need for a special diet, specific questions about menu items should be asked. The menu itself may give away some clues as to whether or not the dish contains wheat by the name or description on the menu (Table 3).

Other specific questions to ask before ordering include:

- Has the meat been marinated in soy sauce, worcheshire, or teriyaki sauce?
- Is chicken dusted with flour before pan-frying?
- Is the oil used for French fries also used to make the chicken nuggets (or other breaded products)?
- Are artificial bacon bits used on potato skins and salads?
- Is an artificial mashed potato mix used?
- Is imitation crabmeat or seafood used?
- Are there croutons on the salad?

Additional helpful hints are listed in Table 4.

### HELP YOUR PATIENT SUCCEED

To further improve your patient's quality of life by being able to enjoy a meal away from home, direct them to useful resources (Table 2). Another valuable resource, not only for dining out but for general support and information, is a local celiac support group (to find the nearest one near you go to: [http://www.celiac.com/st\\_main.html](http://www.celiac.com/st_main.html)— scroll down to Celiac Disease Support Groups, Organizations & Contacts and follow links). Networking with other people with celiac disease to find restaurants that are gluten friendly can decrease the anxiety level some patients feel about eating out. Some support groups offer organized outings to a restaurant that have been contacted and a pre-selected GF meal is offered.

**Table 4**  
**More Hints for Dining Out**

- **Select the right restaurant.** If given a choice of restaurants, choose one that offers a gluten-free menu or is accommodating to special dietary need (Table 2).
- **Visit the restaurant's web site** for nutrition information and menus. This will help in selecting both the restaurant and the menu item you would like to try. Chain restaurants have nutrition information available as well as contact information if you need more help. If the restaurant does not have a website, ask them to fax you a copy of their menu.
- **Call ahead.** Especially for someone who is uncomfortable asking a lot of questions once they are at the restaurant. It also gives the chef a heads-up if extra time is needed to prepare a gluten-free item.
- **Speak to manager, maitre d', or chef.** The key is to get your special needs conveyed to the chef or cook. If your waiter appears uninterested or willing to help, ask for the manager.
- **Dine early or late** at non-peak hours if possible. If the staff is less hurried, you can spend more time to ask questions or speak to the chef.
- **Bring along gluten-free foods.** Bring safe crackers or rolls to munch on while waiting.
- **Ask questions.** Use a dining card to help the staff understand your special diet.
- **Order simple dishes** and ask for the sauce on the side or omitted altogether. A suggested phrased coined by Anne Lee, nutritionist at the Celiac Disease Center at Columbia University in helping patients order safe food is to ask for "Naked Food"<sup>(10)</sup>.
- **Ask for a clean cooking surface** and clean utensils. If ordering off the gluten-free menu, make sure the waiter conveys this message to the chef, as the ingredients may be gluten-free but not prepared in an area that is safe.
- **Do not hesitate to send food back** if not correct.
- **Be prepared to leave a restaurant** if you feel your needs are not taken seriously.
- **Thank your server** and leave a generous tip for good service.
- **Be a repeat customer** to gluten friendly restaurants, as they will try hard to please a regular guest.
- **Take a cooking class** to learn cooking terms or food preparation to become more familiar with potential hidden sources of gluten when dining out.

National support groups such as the Gluten Intolerant Group (GIG), offer programs such as tips for dining out and a listing of gluten friendly restaurants that participate in programs like the Gluten-Free Restaurant Awareness Program. The Celiac List Serve includes daily questions about “gluten friendly” restaurants while traveling (to join send email to [celiac@listserv.icors.org](mailto:celiac@listserv.icors.org)). There are seminars and workshops around the country specifically designed to help educate patients on the ‘ins and outs’ of dining out. Bob and Ruth’s Gluten-Free Dining & Travel club offer workshops and group travel that are gluten-free.

Several books are useful in finding a gluten friendly restaurant and what to look for on the menu once you arrive at the restaurant. *Let’s Eat Out! Your Passport to Living Gluten and Allergy Free* covers 10 food allergens, including wheat, that may be encountered for seven international cuisines (8). *Triumph Dining* offers “The Essential Gluten-Free Restaurant Guide” that educates the reader on how and where to eat gluten-free. Triumph also has dining cards for six different cuisines—American, Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Mexican, and Thai (9). This is helpful when language is a barrier to communicating the restriction of the GFD to restaurant staff.

## CONCLUSION

Taking the time to help patients with celiac disease learn to navigate their way around a restaurant with success will increase the quality of their lifestyle and help them to comply with the only treatment currently available for celiac disease, a strict gluten-free diet. ■

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## CORRECTION

On page 113 in the September issue of *Practical Gastroenterology* Atalimumab should have been spelled Adalimumab.