

Gluten Free



Practical Advice for a
Happy Healthy Gluten-Free Life

Claire Baker

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Gluten Free: Practical Advice for a Happy, Healthy Gluten-Free Life

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**Practical Advice for a
Happy Healthy Gluten-Free Life**

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I originally got the idea to turn my passion for living happy, healthy, and gluten-free into a business from [Rich German](#), an inspiring coach and author. If you are interested in making a living doing what you love and helping people along the way, I encourage you to get Rich’s free ebook, *Monetize Your Passion*, and get started!



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Gluten Free: Practical Advice for a Happy Gluten-Free Life

Introduction

Whether you've gotten a diagnosis of celiac disease, you have a intolerance or allergy to wheat, or you have decided to eliminate gluten for other health-promoting reasons, it's never been easier to live gluten-free, and it's getting easier all the time. It's estimated that one in 133 people has celiac disease, more are deemed gluten intolerant, and still more just seem to feel better when they stay away from wheat in general.



Claire Baker, founder of So What CAN You Eat? and www.clairebakerok.com

About me: I am sneaking up on 50 years of age, and have spent the last 25 years in the quest for excellent health, work-life balance, contributing to the greater good through my profession and extra-curriculars, and generally trying to live a fun, engaged and meaningful life. I've had some big "Aha!" moments in my life which have brought me to where I am today.

I came out in April 1986. I haven't had alcohol since January 1991. I became a vegetarian for ethical reasons in 1993. I haven't had chocolate since January 1994. I achieved my black belt in Tae Kwon Do in 1997. My partner Jenn and I had our kids in 2001 and 2003. We were legally wed in California in 2008 after 17 years of non-sanctioned marriage. I began running and following the Joel Fuhrman "Eat to Live" approach to eating in 2009, for health and weight-loss reasons. In 2010 I was identified as having celiac disease and have been gluten free ever since.

You may wonder how all of these things are related. The real answer is that the process of

dealing with all of those major life changes *feels* similar. Life as I knew it to be and expected it to be changed with each self-revelation or health-related decision. Although I've had a lot of practice in making major changes in my daily life, like most people, I actually resist change.

Additionally, I've spent my career in non-profit management. My approach as a manager has always been as a coach, working with folks to identify what they need to get done, helping them figure out the steps they need to get there, overcoming obstacles, and celebrating successes.

Ultimately, that's why I can help others who also need to make big changes. In this particular instance, I've consciously made gluten-free living fun. I rarely feel deprived. I know how to navigate restaurants, and I have a good sense of what I can eat without being too nervous. My celiac diagnosis is a blessing.

My Celiac Story

Diarrhea. Constipation. Gas. Bloating. (It had occurred to me that I might have irritable bowel syndrome, but I didn't want to even entertain that idea.) Canker sores. It was the anemia that finally caused the mystery of my miscellaneous health issues to unravel.

When I was 21 I got a kidney stone which wouldn't pass. During the plethora of testing during that episode, doctors discovered severe anemia. Fortunately I never had a recurrence of the kidney stone, but I never really got over the anemia. Over the next two and a half decades, I intermittently attempted to address my iron-poor blood by taking supplements, but invariably I became lax or inattentive. Finally, in January of 2010 I had a new primary care physician who noted my severe anemia and really encouraged me to get to the bottom of it. I decided to get serious. I took iron twice a day for five months with no improvement. She referred me to a hematologist.

While waiting for my hematology appointment, I had some significant gastrointestinal (GI) issues that my primary physician and lots of tests couldn't explain. I figured that it happened to everyone sometimes, and that my vegetarian diet heavy on veggies and beans was at least part of the problem.



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I hadn't connected the recent GI complaints to the anemia. My hematologist was terrific, approaching me as a whole person, and not as just my blood. He asked me questions about my GI issues, and finally put the pieces together.

In August of 2010, after testing positive for celiac antibodies and having a conclusive duodenal biopsy, I was officially diagnosed with celiac disease and made the switch to a gluten-free diet. I set up my follow-up care for celiac and GI related needs at the Celiac Center at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. Almost all of my GI distress, especially the gas and bloating, abated pretty quickly once I started the GF diet. Added bonus? No more canker sores! After a year on the GF diet, all signs of intestinal damage are gone.

About this book: This book is chock full of real-life tips and tricks to living gluten free with a minimum of hassle and a maximum of good eating and good health. It leans heavily toward vegetarianism because I have been a vegetarian for many years. Do note that being a vegetarian

doesn't particularly make gluten-free living any easier. Specifically, you'll have more options in restaurants if you eat meat. More on that later. You CAN have an interesting dietary life and be on a strict gluten-free diet, but it takes some practice and some getting used to. This book is designed to help you get there.



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The Science of it All

I'll be the first to tell you that there are a LOT of experts out there who can give you more technical and complete science behind celiac disease, gluten intolerance/sensitivity, and wheat allergies. I've included my summary of it here to provide context to the information in the rest of the book for managing the gluten-free (GF) diet once it's been determined to be the right course for you. By no means is this information intended to represent medical advice and I urge you to open or pursue a dialog with your health care providers about this and other issues. The good news is that addressing your health and wellness concerns through healthy eating and lifestyle habits is never a bad idea. You'll just want to make sure that the path of healthy eating that you take is congruent with YOUR health and wellness needs. Be an active healthcare consumer and trust your instincts if something doesn't seem right or ring true for you. I spent more than 20 years with doctors telling me that my anemia was a function of my female status and my vegetarian status. As a result, we never really looked any harder. You need to be your own best advocate.

What is Gluten?

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye and barley and their derivatives. In this book I'll tell you about common places where gluten lives and hides. Bread, pasta, and baked goods are the obvious places, but watch out for soy sauce, beer, Twizzlers, Tofurkey, salad dressings, soups, airplane peanuts, Pringles... The list is long and sometimes quite surprising. Visit

http://www.csaceliacs.info/label_reading_101.jsp and become familiar with gluten-containing ingredients regularly found in processed foods. The FDA requires that wheat must be listed as a possible allergen in processed foods, but not rye or barley. Labeling of meat, poultry, eggs, and products that contain meat, poultry, and eggs is regulated by the USDA and *does not* have to call out possible allergens (though many do). Learning to read food labels for possible gluten is important for someone committed to living completely gluten-free.

Symptoms of Celiac Disease and Gluten Intolerance

I have talked to so many people who describe their experience of celiac or gluten intolerance as unusual that I'm not certain there is a typical set of symptoms. Certainly gastrointestinal issues are the best known: Gas and bloating; diarrhea, constipation or both; and general stomach upset. Other folks have other issues: brain fog, nutritional deficiencies, skin problems, athletic performance issues, sexual dysfunction, and more. My friend Betty had a persistent cough that went away when she went GF and which comes right back if she ingests gluten. Still others have no symptoms at all.

Celiac Disease vs. Gluten Intolerance

With celiac disease, gluten irritates the lining of the upper part of the small intestine. The immune system kicks in to fight the inflammation, attacking the small intestine itself. The lining of the small intestine is covered in tiny fingerlike projections called villi, and when the immune system attacks, it can cause a blunting or shortening of the villi, which in turn interferes with the absorption of nutrients at the point of inflammation. This inflammation may cause pain, bloating, diarrhea, etc. In addition, the damage to the small intestine can set in motion a number of other far-reaching health-related issues that can cause serious long-term health problems.

A person with gluten intolerance generally doesn't feel well after eating gluten but doesn't have detectable damage to the small intestine. It's not clear if there are long-term health effects for a person who is gluten intolerant but continues to eat gluten.

There are some clues that a person has celiac disease rather than gluten intolerance. In addition to the constellation of symptoms, celiac disease is hereditary, so if you have a family member with celiac you are more likely to have it. There are a number of antibody blood tests your doctor can order that can identify inflammation in the small intestine. If you test positive for those, your

doctor will likely order an endoscopy (a painless medical procedure) and biopsy of your small intestine to see if there is damage to your small intestine.

Check out this website for a checklist that might help you determine if you have celiac disease:

<http://www.celiaccentral.org/disease-symptoms-checklist/>

For me it took 8 months to come up with a definitive celiac diagnosis. A dear relative of mine simply opted to stop eating gluten and not pursue a diagnosis. The end result is that we both feel better, have more energy, and have better health overall. So why bother with all the tests?

Because the consequences to the body can be so major, many experts suggest pursuing an actual diagnosis for celiac disease if you have symptoms or reason to suspect celiac, rather than just cutting out gluten in your diet. For the tests to be accurate, you'd have to keep eating gluten over a period of months in order to lessen the risk getting a false negative result. If you stop eating gluten, the antibodies and inflammation will decrease, and any tests after that may not be accurate. You may decide that intentionally eating gluten and feeling lousy is not the right course of action for you.

I think there are two major reasons to go through the testing. The first is that you and your doctors can be on the lookout for problems that may occur from years of eating gluten. Some of these can be quite serious, including lymphoma and diseases caused by specific nutritional deficiencies. The second reason is largely psychological and could have an impact on your ability to start and stick with a GF diet, which is the only treatment for celiac disease. In the face of temptation, you could say to yourself, "Maybe I'm just gluten intolerant. This piece of birthday cake may make me sick for a couple of days, but it's not a big deal in the long run." If you know that you have celiac and the birthday cake would actually be damaging your system and making you more likely to get really sick later on, I expect that you would be more likely to stick with the GF diet and give the birthday cake a pass.

That said, I know people who have gone gluten-free without testing for really great reasons. One woman I know feels awful when she eats gluten and she doesn't have health insurance to cover the tests. My dear relative knows that he has a genetic likelihood of having celiac, but he doesn't like doctors and he's a man of action and would rather just get on with feeling better than waiting

around. He doesn't knowingly cheat, but he isn't as careful about avoiding gluten when eating out as he could be. Further, a celiac diagnosis could cause career limitations for some jobs or military personnel if the employer is responsible for meals and can't make accommodations for the GF diet. And I know some celiac entrepreneurs who haven't been able to get insurance coverage for their sole proprietorships because of their "preexisting condition" of celiac, even if they've been gluten-free and symptom free for years.

And I know a number of people who have tested negative for celiac but have gone GF anyway, because they just feel better. I mentioned my friend Betty who cured a persistent cough when she avoids gluten, but she tested negative for celiac disease. A co-worker of mine has terrible stomach pain and other symptoms when she eats gluten, but her doctor told her that she doesn't have celiac. Another woman had dermatitis herpetiformis, an itchy skin rash that is often found in people with celiac disease even though her tests came back saying she didn't have celiac. Two of these women occasionally knowingly cheat on the GF diet and pay the price. The third is very strict and never cheats.

There are other good books that contain much more information about the medical aspects of celiac disease. I recommend *Real Life with Celiac Disease: Troubleshooting and Thriving Gluten Free* by Melinda Dennis, MS, RD, LDN and Daniel A. Leffler, MD, MS from the Celiac Center at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. It shares many stories of the different ways celiac disease presents itself, paths to diagnosis, and ways to handle a variety of real-life challenges to addressing them. Another good book is *Recognizing Celiac Disease: Signs, Symptoms, Associated Disorders & Complications* by Cleo J. Libonati, RN, BSN. It is important to educate yourself so that you are a good healthcare consumer and advocate. While all this information may be daunting at first, you can certainly master it. In the long run, you will be healthier and feel better.



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Dealing with the Diagnosis

Assuming you eat a typical American diet, getting a celiac or gluten intolerance diagnosis can send you into the five Elizabeth Kubler Ross stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and finally, (hopefully), Acceptance. It was true for me. Learning that I could never again eat regular bread, birthday cake, pizza and most other baked goods, and commercial foods that were staples in my diet, like Boca Burgers, Cheerios, soy sauce, and tons of other daily foods made me at times alternately angry and depressed. When I read up about how to keep from cross-contaminating my foods, I'd try to deny how much gluten I could possibly be ingesting by using the household toaster, accidentally stirring my dinner with the wrong spoon, or using the same butter as the rest of my family. Finally, I came to a place of acceptance, though at times I still fall back into a bit of anger or depression when I can't eat something that sounds particularly good or won't visit a former favorite restaurant because I lack confidence in their food handling practices with regard to gluten. There have been times when my partner and I would enter a restaurant for dinner, decide that I couldn't confidently get a gluten-free meal there and have to leave – and I would burst into tears about not being able to live my life as fully as I felt I should.

The good news is that as you get more practiced at living the GF lifestyle, it gets easier and becomes just another part of living. I have to admit that approaching it with a bit of an activist spirit helps. Every time you ask a waiter for a GF menu (even if you expect that they don't have one), you are not only advocating for yourself, you are making a statement that GF options make

a difference in your decisions about where to eat. When you thank the server or restaurant owner/manager/chef for making your GF experience a pleasant one, you are rewarding their attention to your needs and conveying that such attention can improve their bottom line by increasing the size of the tip and the likelihood that you will return. Oh, and I give good tips to my accommodating servers.

Getting to a place where GF living is effortless (or at least not a huge inconvenience) requires some thought and planning. To do this, you need to pay attention to your home, how to shop, and where to dine out. You'll also need some strategies for times when you find yourself in a situation when you haven't had a chance to make a plan. Finally, you'll want to develop a list of go-to foods that fit your lifestyle and tastes. This book offers some tried and true strategies to help you on your journey.



Spicy Edamame Black Bean Roasted Corn Salad from my ecookbooklet, [So What CAN You Eat? Gluten-Free Paleo Vegan \(mostly\) Recipes for Health and Weight Loss](#)

Planning for Healthy and Happy Eating

I attribute my ability to stay on a GF diet without falter to several factors: 1) We set up our kitchen to minimize gluten contamination of my food; 2) I identified certain go-to foods to always have on hand; 3) I got used to the idea that most of my meals would be made at my house where I knew for sure what went into them and how the food was handled; and 4) I think ahead about what I will eat for the day/the trip/the family outing. I started planning my meals in advance before I had the celiac diagnosis as part of a weight-loss strategy, but I found that it works great for GF meal planning as well. For example, if I know I'm having lunch out with a

colleague, I do research about a GF-friendly destination at least the day before (more on scoping out restaurants below.)

The following sections are devoted to setting up your kitchen, tips for meal planning, and replacing your old favorites with GF options.



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Setting up a Gluten-safe Kitchen

If you live alone, it's easier to create a GF environment. At the outset, you need to check all of the labels on all of your foods and get rid of anything you can't eat. Donate it to a food bank. Give it to your friends. There's no need to keep it around. You'll soon become an expert at reading labels, shopping for GF items and calling manufacturers when it's just not clear.

In a household that has both gluten-eaters and gluten-avoiders, it is a little trickier, but once you get a system established, it's easy to maintain. The first thing you need to do is identify the areas of possible accidental gluten contamination of the food you eat. Contamination can happen when errant crumbs or flours make their way onto or into the food you are eating. For example, if you are using the same butter as your non-gluten-restricted co-habitants, then you may be getting bread crumbs on your knife along with the butter when you pick it up. Here are some ways to avoid accidental contamination:

- Separate and clearly ID the GF foods that might get contaminated: Mark or otherwise differentiate the GF foods, especially spreads like butter, peanut butter, dips, etc, so that no one inadvertently gets bread crumbs or whatever in your stash. In our house, we use bright green duct tape to label my stuff, and we keep it separate from its gluten-available counterpart. For example, my peanut butter is a different brand, it's labeled with the green tape, and it lives on a different shelf than the peanut butter my kids grab when they go to make a sandwich for themselves.
- Establish a GF toasting protocol: Toasters are full of gluteny crumbs that can get transmitted to your GF bread if you use it. To solve this, you can get a separate toaster for GF breads. If you don't want to do that, you can take other precautions. If you have a toaster oven rather than a conventional toaster, be sure and put your items on foil and not directly on the rack. I do this at work, though I find that the bottom doesn't toast so well, requiring a toast flip part-way through. If you have a conventional toaster, get yourself some toaster sleeves, little pillowcases for your GF bread slice. Slide your bread in the sleeve, put it in the toaster and toast away. This is what I do at home. The sleeves work great! I don't eat it often, but sometimes a girl just needs to make some hot buttered toast. And, as you will note in my editorial section about GF sandwiches, being able to safely toast GF bread can really enhance one's dining experience.
- Designate GF utensils: Washing cooking utensils takes care of gluten, so this advice is not so much about keeping your utensils unsullied by taboo foods, but more about taking the active brain out of the equation of accidental contamination. What's that, you say? I don't know about your household, but in our place, it's not unusual to have pasta on to boil at the same time I'm cooking a GF stirfry. Same stove, same kitchen footprint. It's very easy to step away for a minute, step back, and accidentally pick up the pasta spoon and stir the GF fare, completely contaminating the meal. This has happened to me. Our way to successfully combat this is to have designated gluten-free food prep utensils. I went out and bought a collection of matching stirrers, spatulas, spoons, etc that we keep in a separate drawer from the gluten utensils. They look nothing like the hodgepodge of other cooking utensils, so when one of them is out on the stove, it's easy to remember that it's being used for the gluten-free food. It's automatic. I don't have to think about it. I never goof and have to wonder if I stirred with the wrong spoon. In the same vein, I have

a GF cutting board. Gluten-y bread or other foods will never be cut on it. It looks different than our other cutting boards. My partner and I always know which one to grab for GF food prep.

- Wash, wipe down, and use barriers: Crumbs are your enemy. Everyone who makes food using gluten-filled ingredients should get into the habit of wiping down the counter regularly. In addition, you should be sure to do your GF food production on a clean plate, cutting board, paper towel or some such. Being conscientious in this way affords you two levels of protection.
- Wash your hands often: If you are like me and you prepare non-GF foods for others in the house, remember to wash up after, and resist the temptation to lick the errant peanut butter off your finger.
- Be mindful of the order in which you prepare foods: This is important in our house because our kitchen isn't so big and we don't have lots of space for duplicate colanders and pans. Plus, I'm the chief washer of dishes, and I'd rather minimize the workload. So, if I'm having GF pasta and the family is having regular pasta, we make sure to strain mine first, then strain theirs in the same colander. Or if it's veggies, we steam and drain the broccoli first, then use the same strainer for the noodles for the mac & cheese. Think through how everything will need to come together, and you'll eat safely and be able to save some space in the sink or the dishwasher.
- Be mindful in general: You'll need to generally become more aware of and vigilant about possible contamination issues. At a recent party, we set out GF hummus with baby carrots and GF rice crackers as a little appetizer. We also put out regular pretzels, not thinking that people would be inclined to dip the pretzels in the hummus. Upon realizing the potential for the tub of hummus to get "glutened" but before it did, we got out a second dish, transferred some hummus to it and told the guests which dip needed to stay pristine.
- Special caution about baking: For folks who are bakers, you'll need to take special care if you bake with regular flours. Flour can go everywhere and can coat kitchen surfaces on which you make your gluten-free fare. Planning the sequence of food prep is really important in that situation – do the GF cooking and baking first. Then do the regular baking and leave time for a good wipe-down of all surfaces afterwards. Depending on

how sensitive you are to gluten, you may need to put a moratorium on all regular baking in your kitchen.

Check out my You Tube video on this very topic: [Happy and gluten-free in a non-gluten-free kitchen.](#)

Menu planning

The safest way to eat GF is to maximize your control over the production of your food. The easiest way to do that is to make all your own food, or know that the person or people cooking for you know how to do it GF and are committed to your good health. For many, there are gluten eaters and non-gluten eaters cohabitating, and you'll need to find a way to co-exist happily.

In the early days, there will be a period of adjustment akin to becoming vegetarian in an omnivorous household. When my partner visited her parents the first time after becoming vegetarian, her dad, who was well-meaning but not very aware of vegetarianism in general, prepared a white bean and ham soup and removed the ham bone before serving it, thinking that this qualified as vegetarian cooking. Similar things can happen with GF living.

For example, the partner (a physician) of a friend of mine ordered take-out meat balls and served them to my GF friend and a long-time friend who has celiac because it just didn't occur to her that the meatballs might be made with breadcrumbs. It could be she's never made them herself. Her partner and the friend assumed that the meatballs were GF because the person serving them was aware of their GF needs and of course had no desire to make anyone sick.

To make your own GF foods, you'll first want to know what you want to eat, then you'll need to know how to shop. As mentioned, there are plenty of GF replacement foods hitting the market, but mostly they aren't terribly healthful and need to be used in moderation. Your good health depends not only on living GF, but also on eating a balanced diet full of nutrients, especially the stuff you might be deficient in because of celiac: iron, B12, folate, calcium, D vitamins.

Fortunately, many whole, healthy foods, including vegetables, are naturally GF, as are beans, nuts, seeds and many grains.



Gluten-free Veggie Quiche from my ecookbooklet [So What CAN You Eat? Gluten-Free Paleo Vegan \(mostly\) recipes for Health and Weight Loss](#)

Breakfast

So, to get started, make a list of foods you currently like to eat for breakfast at home. Then think about GF ways to have what you want (or pretty close, anyway).

Here's a table that lists common meal ideas, with GF options.

Typical Breakfast	Gluten-free Alternatives
Cold cereal, granola	Rice Chex, Corn Chex, other GF cold cereals
Hot cereal	GF oatmeal (though not everyone agrees about oats being okay for a GF diet), quinoa, rice, other lesser-known grains
Toast, French toast	Toast or French toast made with GF bread
Bagels, doughnuts, pastries	GF replacement products
Pancakes, waffles, biscuits	Use GF Bisquick or other GF mix/flour
Eggs	Eggs, taking care to keep bread crumbs away
Bacon or sausage	Check labels for gluten in processed meats
Yogurt	Yogurt (check labels for gluten in flavorings or crunchy toppings)
Fruit	No gluten in any fresh fruit!
Hash browns, breakfast potatoes, other veggies you can make at home	All fresh vegetables, including potatoes are GF; take care re: seasonings and cross-contamination. (Do not assume that fast-food hash browns are gluten free – McDonalds definitely ARE NOT GLUTEN FREE)

Cold cereal; granola: I ate Cheerios for most mornings of my life. Knowing that I would never eat them again definitely made me angry and a little depressed (thanks, Elizabeth Kubler Ross!). Even though you will never eat another bowl of Wheaties, if cold cereal is your go-to breakfast, then you are in luck! In addition to the health food store brands of cereal like Barbara's, GF cereals are going mainstream. For example, Rice and Corn Chex are gluten-free and clearly marked. There are also generic/store brand of these chex cereals which I think are comparable and some of which are GF.

That said, you need to READ THE LABEL. Not all of the knock-offs are GF even if what they are copying is a GF name brand. This is an area where I would stress the importance of staying

away from any cereal that's not clearly marked as GF. Cereals with wheat and barley dominate the market, and cereals without obvious gluten content are often processed in the same facilities, so it's not worth the risk of contamination. **WATCH OUT FOR BARLEY!** For whatever reason, Rice Crispies has barley in it, and barley isn't a required label caution like wheat is. I've heard that they are working on a brown rice Rice Crispies cereal which is GF, though I haven't seen it in any stores, yet.

As for granola, I haven't seen any mainstream brands marked GF yet. Trader Joe's has a clearly marked GF variety. Bakery on Main and Udi's also make a granola, which I've seen in health food stores, and which you can order on-line. A big caution on GF granola is that it is pretty high in calories. A serving, 2/3 cup, has 270 calories before milk. And I don't know about you, but cereal for breakfast leaves me hungry by 10:30 am, so I tend to eat more than the suggested serving.

Hot cereals: Immediately before my celiac diagnosis I was eating oatmeal for breakfast most days. I would add berries and a banana and douse it with vanilla almond milk, and it was tasty and satisfying and good for me. Then I started the GF diet and the research about the safety of oats is up for debate. Apparently oats are a distant cousin of wheat, which may be part of the problem. Also, most oats are also grown, shipped, and processed in close proximity to wheat, rye and barley. Some manufacturers are taking care to produce oats that are not cross-contaminated and their oats are labeled gluten-free. I think this is a judgment call you'll need to make based on your experience with your body. If you are highly sensitive to gluten, then I don't think it's worth the risk. If you are asymptomatic when you eat oats, maybe you think it's worth the risk. If that's the case, minimize your risk by only eating oats marked GF. If you are at a restaurant and oatmeal is on the breakfast menu, I wouldn't risk it. Go with the fruit cup. (I must confess that I do eat GF oatmeal cookies when they cross my path. Until someone starts making quinoa raisin cookies, I expect I'll occasionally make this oat-y exception.)

I decided that there are enough other grains out there that I can eat for breakfast that are GF that I could make the switch easily enough and not take the gamble. There is a world of non-oat grains that you can try as a breakfast food. Rice you are familiar with. Occasionally I will cook a pan of rice for breakfast, but white rice doesn't have much going for it nutritionally, and brown rice

takes longer than I usually have. We have recently discovered frozen brown rice that microwaves in just a few minutes, so that could be a viable option. Another GF friend of mine swears by her rice cooker and regularly makes a big pot for the current meal and has leftovers for later.

A fast-cooking and healthier grain is quinoa. Many people talk about its nutty goodness. I keep it in my rotation for breakfast (and for other meals) mostly because it's high in protein (for a grain) and has other nutritional benefits. I find that it ends up being a good vehicle for the delivery of fruit and almond milk.

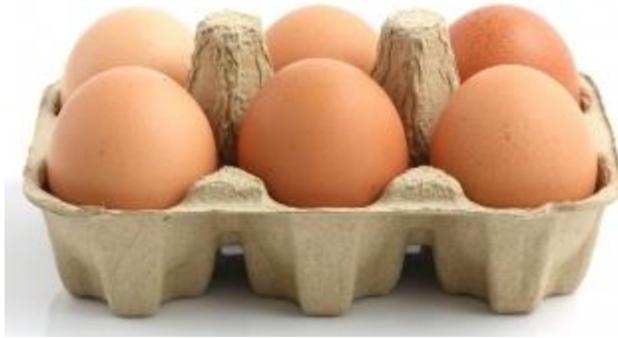
Another grain you might want to try if you can find it is buckwheat. (Even though it contains the word *wheat*, it isn't a wheat derivative at all and is GF.) Cream of buckwheat cereal has an oatmeal consistency, though I find that I like it best with some honey or agave nectar, bananas and milk. The tartness of berries with buckwheat is a bad combination.

There are pre-packaged options, like Bob's Red Mill Mighty Fine Breakfast Cereal, which I find to be purely adequate. It gets a bit gummy for my taste, but it's okay on occasion. Personally I find it to be fun to buy a new product every so often to try it out. Who knows how much you might like millet or amaranth?

Toast, French toast, bagels, doughnuts, pastries and other baked goods: Pre-packaged GF bread, bagels and baked goods are available in the aisles and frozen sections of some mainstream stores, health-food stores or on-line. Do note that they are typically higher in calories and less nutritious than the products they are trying to mimic because they tend to have more fats and sugars to approximate the taste and texture that gluten provides. As for breads, there are many kinds made from lots of different grains made by a number of different bakeries. My best, shortest advice when starting out: Buy Udi's. Or at least start with Udi's so that you have a widely available GF gold standard by which to compare the others, such as Kinnikinnick or Scharrs. If you don't find a brand of bread you like, then you'll be glad to explore other meal staples that don't require bread, or, like many, you may be interested in trying bread mixes or taking a stab at GF baking. For the most part, I have drastically reduced my bread consumption and when I do need some, I try to keep a bag of Udi's plain bagels in the freezer. I've written about it more extensively in the lunch and travel sections. When toasting store-bought or homemade bread in the toaster, be sure to follow your established GF toasting protocols.

The freezer section of your local health-food store or the GF or health-food sections of your enlightened mainstream grocery store will stock GF doughnuts, muffins, cinnamon rolls, waffles and other GF bakery items. Some are okay, others not so much. Like with all GF replacement foods, I find it to be rather entertaining to give a new thing a try every once in awhile, so that I'll know whether to bother with it again. I have enjoyed making the occasional GF banana nut bread using Namaste's Gluten-free Perfect Flour Blend and the recipe on the side of the package. It turns out moist and tasty. I've also made muffins from Zocalo Blue Corn Meal that I got as a holiday gift. These baking endeavors are my occasional weekend recreational project. As these foods are not a staple of mine, I don't count on having them for my usual expedient weekday breakfast; they're more a dessert sort of treat. However, if you want easily accessible, affordable baked goods and you like to bake or are open to learning, then I suggest you bake like crazy when you have time, freeze most of the product and thaw what you need for convenient, go-to breakfasts or snacks.

Pancakes, waffles, biscuits: One a recent trip to Roswell, NM, I checked out the shelves of the grocery department at Walmart. Because it is such a remote town, I was surprised to find quite a few GF options. One of them was GF Bisquick. I first discovered GF Bisquick on the shelves of my local grocery store, and have made pancakes, biscuits and pizza crust from it (I don't have a waffle maker, or I'm sure I would have tried that as well.) Of those uses, I found the pancakes and biscuits to be the most satisfactory and the most like their gluteny cousins. I've also tried and liked Pamela's pancake mix, and I know that there are several other brands out there. Because pancakes don't need to do all that rising, it's apparently easier to have a successful make-at-home experience than with baked goods that do need to rise. Check out a mix or two, find the one you like the best and stick with it. Oh, and get yourself some good maple syrup. Not that cheap syrup has gluten in it, but I've found that the GF pancakes I've made truly aren't as good as the ones I used to eat, so I recognize GF pancakes for what they really are: delivery vehicles for flavorful, high quality syrup.



[Image courtesy of piyato at freedigitalphotos.net](#)

Eggs: Yea! Eggs are naturally GF! That doesn't mean that there aren't things to consider. In my house, most notably, is the butter dish. If we are making eggs for the whole family, we just have to be careful to use MY butter, not the FAMILY butter. No errant crumbs should come in contact with the eggs. And, since toast frequently accompanies eggs, be sure and following your toasting precautions. If you are eating out, see the section about likely cross-contamination of eggs with gluten-containing foods. I once got very sick from diner eggs which shared their grill with bread items, so just know where your eggs have been before you eat them.

Bacon or sausage: My research indicates that bacon is generally a GF food, and some brands are clearly marked as such (as always, I'd go for the ones that label themselves GF.) Sausage seems to be another matter. As with any food that's a compilation of other products all mashed together, there is more opportunity for gluten ingredient inclusion or gluten contamination. Read the labels. Hormel does a good job of noting on their website which meats (and lots of other products they produce) are GF, including some sausage products, bacon, and other meats. If you are eating out, I'd have to caution away from breakfast meats since there is no way to be sure that the surface they are cooked on is not contaminated with gluten from other sources.

Yogurt: Most yogurts that I have encountered are GF. Check the labels, especially with flavored yogurts; be on the lookout for any extra "gluten-y" additives – malt flavoring, cookie or granola bits added, etc.



Image courtesy of Pixomar at freedigitalphotos.net

Fruit: More good news! Fruit as designed and packaged by Mother Nature is naturally GF. Though I haven't run into any frozen or canned fruit that has any hint of gluten, be careful around anything that has been overly processed or prepared. As for dried fruit, some people worry that the machinery that raisins and other sticky dried fruits are processed on gets dusted with flour. I haven't found any credible source to validate that. The people at Sun-Maid are adamant that their raisins come in no contact with flour at any time. When in doubt, call the manufacturer.

Hash browns, other potatoes or veggies: Veggies themselves are naturally GF, but I would trust breakfast potatoes and veggies only if you are making them yourself. As with restaurant eggs and meats, the possibility of cross contamination of hash browns or other potatoes and veggies is quite likely.



Spicy Red Lentil and Spinach stew found at www.clairebakerok.com/recipes.html and also in my ecookbooklet [So What CAN You Eat? Gluten-Free Paleo Vegan \(mostly\) recipes for Health and Weight Loss](#)

Lunch

It is pretty manageable to make your lunches yourself. Many people rely on leftovers of previous meals, so hopefully you created or ordered that food with enough care that you are comfortable that it is gluten-free. The table below highlights some typical lunches and some GF options.

Sandwich	Sandwich made on GF bread, be careful with toppings
Salad	Salad, with special considerations
Soup	Soup, with special considerations
Leftovers	GF leftovers!
Pre-fab microwave meals: Lean Cuisine, Weight Watchers, Stouffers, Healthy Choice	Selected models in many mainstream brands. Thai Kitchen, Amy's, Trader Joe's, Glutino

Sandwiches: Sandwiches are a tried and true lunch option. You can buy or make gluten-free bread. Udi's and Rudi's sandwich breads taste pretty good. I haven't made bread from scratch in my entire life (well, there were those times as a little kid when I'd assist my dad, who'd start at 9 pm and we'd be up until 2 am kneading, etc, and then the crust was so, well, crusty, that I'd dig a couple of soft bites out of the middle and go to bed a little disappointed, but that's another story), so my knowledge about how to make a decent GF bread is limited to what I've read on the subject. If you regularly eat or pack sandwiches, here are some things to think about:

1) Cost of store-bought GF bread. A loaf of Udi's whole grain bread sells for more than twice as much as regular bread. If you really love bread, you might want to get a bread machine. A dear friend did well with eliminating bread from his diet in general, but he really missed being able to make a sandwich or toast at will. Knowing that his wife had a bread machine, I sent a bag of Pamela's bread mix, which she prepared for him. He was overjoyed to come into the house from an outing and smell the delicious aroma of fresh baked bread that he could actually eat. He was so happy he almost made me want to run out and buy a bread machine. (It was the cost of the addition on the house that stopped me.) Of course, GF flours and bread mixes aren't inexpensive either. If you are a true bread connoisseur, check out www.Glutenfreecookingschool.com and consider investing

in her bread making program. There are lots of people out there that have spent a lot of time perfecting GF baking, and they write about it on their blogs and websites. Have fun with it and see if you can come up with your own

2) Sandwich quality. From the limited baking I have done, I know that gluten provides a lot of the spongy texture and density of the baked good. As for Udi's and Rudi's breads, both are quite porous. I suppose this has something to do with the science of getting the bread to rise and be about the right size and consistency of regular bread while at the same time making it enjoyable to the palate. And while I like the taste okay, I've decided I don't particularly like sandwiches made from them.

As a disclaimer, I need to note that I've never been that into bread. Lucky, I suppose, given my celiac diagnosis. I have eaten plenty of bread in my life, but even pre-diagnosis, most sandwiches I have consumed in my life were all about maximizing convenience and portability. Most sandwiches I have constructed I made in advance for later enjoyment, since I don't reach for a sandwich first when I can eat what I want when I want. For my weight management and good health strategy, I try to stick with vegetables, beans, nuts and fruits as my go-to source. Sandwiches are handy when I have to bring a meal and packing my usual salad and fruit is impractical. My experience with store-bought GF breads is that moist spreads such as jelly, nut butters, hummus, mustard, etc ooze through the pores to the outside of the sandwich, robbing it of its convenience as an easy, unmessy portable food option. With a goopy sandwich, I don't set it down because my hands get messy, and thus I find that I eat it really fast to minimize the amount of lunch that will end up falling on my pants. Bolting my food is unsatisfying and it makes me feel kind of yucky physically.

Still, having a sandwich option is important. On recent travels, I tried several GF tortillas. Both corn and rice tortillas were kind of brittle and spreads escaped from their confines almost as much as the GF breads. (Rudi's has recently come out with a pretty bendy tortilla, so it's always good to check out new products from time to time.)

And then I found the solution to the goopy sandwich. Udi's Bagels! These days, I keep a bag of them in the freezer and thaw them one at a time for my sandwich needs. Once thawed, I toast it

using toaster sleeves, since we don't have a dedicated GF toaster. Then I add whatever sandwich fixin's I want or have on hand. The bagels are chewy like regular bagels, so toasting makes it more sandwich-friendly so that the contents don't squeeze out upon biting down. Voila! A good-tasting, real sandwich experience that doesn't feel like a compromise and which doesn't require a fistful of napkins or wet wipes. A couple of notes of caution: an Udi's plain bagel has a whopping 280 calories all by itself, so for me it's a real splurge, and a bag of 4 bagels costs as much as a loaf of GF bread, which is also a splurge.

3) Health impacts – as noted, GF breads have lots of calories, and not lots of nutrition. And even though your bread may be gluten-free, you still have to pay attention to the spreads and toppings for gluten content. Watch the lunch meat and check ingredients on your spreads.

Salads: Great choice! Make it interesting! Lettuce or spinach bed, with a protein source, no croutons, GF salad dressing. Extra veggies. Add some nuts for crunch and healthy fats. Mix it up. I top with beans or lentils, skip the cheese, and use a chunky salsa for dressing and to skip the fat of most store-bought dressings. Tasty, GF, and not all oily. You can use cheese, just be careful of flavored or aged or whatever kinds of cheeses that might have gluten contamination issues; be careful of any weird lunchmeat. See how I assemble the typical lunch salad that I take to work with me most days: [Gluten-free fast and healthy lunch salad](#).

Soup: If you make it yourself, it's healthier and will have less sodium than most store-bought brands. Many canned soups have gluten of some sort, either in the form of a thickener, or barley or wheat pasta for flavor. Read ingredients! If the labeling doesn't mark it as "gluten free", this is a product that I would avoid, or if it sounds really good, I'd definitely call the manufacturer to ask about.

Leftovers: A great choice! Well, it's great if you used gluten-free rigor in making or ordering the food in the first place, that is. I'm a big fan of leftovers for lunch or dinner because I know what's in it, and I must like it well enough or I wouldn't eat it twice. My health-tip of the day is to not reheat in a plastic container. Transfer it to a real dish before putting it in the microwave to keep plastic chemicals from leaching into your soup and to improve your dining experience.

Pre-packaged microwave meals: This is also a frequent choice for many. The big plus is convenience. The downside as many people have discovered is the price – frequently these can cost more than \$5 per meal, and they aren't always completely satisfying in and of themselves. This is definitely a place where you need to read the labels. Like commercially packaged soups, if it's not clearly marked gluten-free, call the manufacturer. Thai Kitchen is a brand that's frequently available in regular grocery stores, and the Trader Joe's shelf-stable gluten-free Indian foods are inexpensive and clearly labeled. I usually have a TJ's meal squirreled away in my desk drawer at work so that if I find myself unprepared for lunch, I have a safe, go-to meal and can avoid the Russian roulette of eating what might be offered during that "working lunch" meeting. Amy's and Glutino's have lots of options if you can find them and you don't mind spending the money.



Sweet Potato Spinach Chili Casserole from my ecookbooklet [So What CAN You Eat? Gluten-Free Paleo Vegan \(mostly\) recipes for Health and Weight Loss](#)

Dinner

I found a really great website that has a weekly vegetarian GF menu planner with recipes that I can use to get ideas: beyondriceandtofu.com. Another good one for the non-vegetarian household with kids is <http://celiacsinthehouse.com>. Also, these two You Tube videos highlight my love affair with lentils and beans and greens: [Happy and gluten-free dinner, part 1](#) and [Happy and gluten-free dinner, part 2](#).

In my life, I make sure I have the staples listed below. I frequently make a big pot of food that I eat for lunches or dinners throughout the week. It is so nice to come home to GF food that is already prepared and that I know I like! Some of my favorites are [spicy red lentil and kale stew](#); [Mom's split pea soup](#); chili; egg fried rice; broccoli, red pepper and tofu stir fry over rice;

edamame, black bean, roasted corn salad. Some of my favorite recipes are in [*So What CAN You Eat? Gluten Free, Paleo, Vegan \(mostly\) Recipes for Health and Weight Loss*](#), my ecookbooklet available at the Amazon Kindle Store or from my website at <http://www.clairebakerok.com/ebooks-and-resources.html>.

Beans: I use a lot of canned beans both for my salads and for dinner creations. I know some people are worried about canned beans, but if they are good enough for [Dr. Andrew Weil](#), they are good enough for me! I occasionally use dried beans when I've remembered to soak them in advance, or if I'm doing recreational cooking on the weekend. Great for protein and fiber.

Lentils: They are delicious, full of fiber, and cook up a lot faster than most beans, so I eat them a lot. You can find the typical lentil at your grocery store, but if you are fortunate enough to have access to an Indian grocery store, check out the variety! I LOVE red lentils.

Veggies: Onions, garlic, carrots, and celery are the top stars of most of my soups. I also use lots of leafy green veggies. In my freezer I keep frozen chopped onions (I usually have fresh around too, but sometimes just want the quick and easy option) and frozen spinach, kale and/or collards. I also keep a jar of minced garlic in the fridge – probably sacrilege to the real cooks out there, but I want the benefits of the garlic without the chopping time. And I like it when my hands don't smell all garlicky.

Nuts and seeds: For me, a great source of flavor that contains protein and healthy fats.

Meats: If I were a meat-eater, I can imagine that I would keep select cuts of my favorites in the freezer, become a fan of canned tuna and chicken, or I'd get a lot better at planning meals ahead of time.

Your favorites made GF: It's pretty likely that the recipe for your favorite foods that currently contain gluten can be made gluten-free. GF baking is a bit of a science that I don't bother with at all, but with the availability of GF replacement products for just about everything, it can be done. There will be trial and error, so enjoy the journey, and take notes each time so that when you finally hit on the winning combination, you'll be able to recreate it at will.

Convenience dinners: Check out the entrees and dinners at glutenfreely.com for ideas and brands to look for at the store (or order on-line) for dinners in a box: Chicken Alfredo, Asian Helper, Beef Stroganoff – all of those speedy dinners like my mom used to make have some sort of GF option these days. Check 'em out and load up the pantry!



Sephardic Roasted Eggs from my ecookbooklet [So What CAN You Eat? Gluten Free, Paleo, Vegan \(mostly\) Recipes for Health and Weight Loss](#)

Quick Snacks

The suggestions below can of course be meals in and of themselves, but I think of them more as quick snacks or fast breakfasts. You never want to get caught feeling hungry at snack time without an easy to reach for, reliable GF snack. I've highlighted some of my favorites on YouTube: [Happy and gluten-free fast snacks and breakfasts](#). Here are some things I keep at hand:

- Baby carrots and hummus or peanut butter
- Udi's GF bagels in the freezer for a sandwich

- Corn or other GF tortillas, cheese and salsa for a quick quesadilla
- Edamame in the freezer. Boils up in a few minutes for a healthy snack.
- GF pretzels, alone or with hummus or peanut butter
- Fresh fruit – apples or bananas with peanut butter are tasty. I also make romaine wraps with peanut butter and banana. Delish!
- Raisins or other dried fruit
- GF tortilla chips and salsa
- Rice Chex or some other GF cereal
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Cheese sticks
- Keep frozen fruit on hand for embellishing GF cereals, making smoothies, or just eating. Add flaxseed, hemp hearts, nuts, milk (dairy, almond, soy), fruit.
- Sauteed greens, veggies and potatoes with a scrambled egg.
- Smoothies. Smoothies are great and easily gluten-free. Smoothie combination ideas for breakfasts or mid-day pick-me-ups if you live a life where that can happen. Add protein powder if you need/want:
 - frozen blueberries, spinach, OJ, almond milk and seltzer. The spinach liquefies — you get used to the green color. Use fresh or frozen.
 - Watermelon, peaches, banana with almond milk, less liquid needed because the watermelon liquefies. Use ice cubes if you aren't using frozen peaches. Add a few raw frozen cranberries for a little zing.
 - Frozen strawberries, banana, mango with juice, clear soda, milk.
 - Veggie protein shake: For times when you don't want something sweet, try a veggie protein shake. I use Spicy V8 Juice or other tomato-centric veggie juice and add kale, spinach or other greens, some plain unsweetened almond milk, hemp hearts and a protein powder that doesn't have added sweeteners.



Veggie Protein Smoothie from my ecookbooklet [So What CAN You Eat? Gluten Free, Paleo, Vegan \(mostly\) Recipes for Health and Weight Loss](#)

Gluten Free Party Food Ideas

Check out my [blog](#) or my [YouTube video](#) for three fast appetizers: Peanut Chili Dip, Quinoa Stuffed Mushrooms, and Peanut Butter stuffed dates. And here's a handful of ideas for party food made from ingredients that are readily available:

- Sweets: Custards and puddings; crustless pies; baked fruit with chopped nuts on top; crustless chocolate cake things (I don't eat chocolate, but I know I'm in the minority!); I've seen plenty of peanut butter cookies that have no flour in them. There are LOTS of choices out there. For baked goods, follow the directions exactly until you get the hang of GF baking. What you know about the look and feel of traditional batters WILL NOT APPLY. GF flours and any additional additives might ultimately bake up like their gluteny counterpart, but the look and the feel of the batter or dough is very different.



[Les religieuses pastries from Helmut Newcake, a gluten-free restaurant and bakery in Paris](#)

- Salty/savory snacks: GF Chex mix (regular recipe but leave out the Wheat Chex, sub in GF pretzels and leave out the bagel chips--and I'd use GF tamari sauce since worcestershire sauce isn't a vegetarian product); nuts; peanut chili dip (made with tamari instead of soy sauce) with carrots; tortilla chips and salsa; crudité's with hummus and other dips. On the fancier side, one of my colleagues recently brought stuffed endive leaves to a party. I'm not a meat-eater, but I note that people will wrap bacon around anything — I saw dates, prunes, apricots and more on a quick search.



Baked pears from So [What CAN You Eat? Gluten Free, Paleo, Vegan \(mostly\) Recipes for Health and Weight Loss](#)

Grocery Shopping

Label Reading

Now that you have some ideas, you'll need to prepare yourself for lots of label reading. Treat yourself to a new pair of reading glasses, because you are going to need them! I did, anyway. Instead of me telling you all of the caveats of where gluten might hide, check out [Gluten Free Label Reading 101](#) from the Celiac Sprue Association. You will quickly get the hang of it. And watch out for what other random people in the world have to say about what contains gluten. For example, LOTS of people think maltodextrin has gluten, but all of the reliable sources I've checked say it doesn't.

Navigating the Aisles

Once you know what you like to have around the house, then you'll need to hit the aisles of the grocery store to find what you need. Generally speaking, the perimeter of the store has the

preponderance of naturally gluten-free foods. Processed foods as a group contain lots of gluten. Even if you live in a place that has very little to offer in the way of GF replacement foods, you can still find plenty to eat at a regular grocery store, though you may need to become accustomed to eating differently and letting go of sandwiches and pasta as part of your regular diet.

If you have a health food store or a foods specialty store nearby, that can help round out your purchases for items that might be harder to find. And if you need to, gluten free mail order is becoming increasingly common and popular.

If you live in a place where GF replacement foods are in plentiful supply on the shelves, do note that many are nutritionally bankrupt, and that it's very common for folks on a GF diet to gain weight. For many, the weight gain is not a desired outcome. A key to managing weight is eating lots of high nutrient foods, and not just GF breads, snacks and baked goods. It's also important to note that GF replacement foods tend to be much more expensive than their GF counterparts.

Watch out for sticker shock in the check-out line!

Give yourself plenty of time for your first couple of GF shopping adventures. Think of it as a field trip and that you are doing research, rather than just trying to get the family's weekly shopping done. If you treat it as fact-finding mission, it'll be more fun, you can explore and compare your options, make notes and generate a list of questions to find the answers to at home before you commit to an expensive and maybe risky basket of groceries. I like to use my smart phone to take pictures of items I want more info about. It makes it super fast and easy to remember what you saw and were curious about but need to follow up on later. I've also made calls to manufacturers right in the store to find out if something that looks good is GF before I buy it. Sometimes I have to wait for a call back, but sometimes I get an answer right away, and that is very cool and empowering.

The shopping guide from glutenfreeshoppingguide.com may prove to be helpful as you acquaint yourself with the most success-oriented way to tackle gluten-free grocery shopping:

[Gluten Free Shopping Guide](#)

Sneaky Gluten Hiding Places

- Oatmeal. As discussed in the breakfast section, this one was a bit of a disappointment. The level of cross-contamination is so high that regular oats are definitely off-limits, and there is even some question about gluten-free oats.
- Soy sauce. It's ubiquitous. It's also a key reason why I haven't eaten in a non-chain Chinese restaurant since I got my diagnosis.
- Licorice and Twizzlers
- Some herbal or flavored teas – Heavy on the barley.
- Rice Crispies (though apparently there are some GF Rice Crispies being introduced in some markets. They are clearly marked as gluten-free, so keep an eye out.)
- McDonald's fries and hash browns
- Benefiber
- Bleu cheese
- Malt vinegar
- Pickles
- Imitation crab
- Candy bars. Every year the folks at [My Gluten Facts](#) publish a list of safe Halloween candy, and since recipes and formulas change, it's good to keep an eye on it.
- Canned soup. Even in varieties where you wouldn't expect it, gluten finds its way into soup. Campbells has relegated its GF offerings to the Wolfgang Puck label.

My top 10 tips for living happy and gluten free when GF shopping is a challenge

- 1) Remember that fresh and most frozen produce is naturally gluten-free. If you can, grow your own! Experiment with seasonal veggies. Discover some new favorite foods. Learn how to freeze, can, or otherwise preserve fresh produce if you grow or buy more than you can use before it goes bad. Also, meat that looks like actual animal muscles and is not flavored or seasoned or whatever is also gluten free. If it's been processed or prepared, be sure to read the package. Call the manufacturer when in doubt, or pick a different meat product.
- 2) Get good at cooking beans in interesting ways. Beans are available everywhere, and really nutritious. Canned beans are gluten free and very handy.

- 3) Advice from my friend Basia: Get a rice cooker and embrace rice as a go-to grain. Rice is available at stores even in the middle of nowhere. I do rice without a rice cooker, but I have to plan ahead a little more.
- 4) Don't forget eggs. I always forget eggs.
- 5) Mail order. For that GF birthday cake that you have to make, you can get GF baking products on Amazon.com or directly from the manufacturer. If you type in "gluten-free foods" at Amazon.com in their "Grocery and Gourmet Foods" menu, there are 3,540 listings. Or better yet, check out one of these websites. The products there may be a splurge, but certainly in the realm of possibility.

www.celiac.com/glutenfreemall *

www.food4celiacs.com *

www.glutenfreepalace.com

www.glutenfreely.com (this is run by General Mills)

www.amazon.com

*these two places sell in household-sized quantities, the others sell by the case.

- 6) Stock up when in the presence of GF food. Buy in volume when you can.
- 7) There are salty snacks that are typically gluten-free: Popcorn. Potato chips. Tortilla chips. Nuts. Read the labels of course, and call the manufacturer when in doubt.
- 8) Sweets: Fruit. Home-made rice pudding. Custard. Ice cream (read the labels.) Crustless pies. The filling is the best part anyway. But don't think you can just eat the filling out of a regular crusty pie – there is no way that could be gluten-free.
- 9) Experiment. Cook more. Don't worry about mistakes. Enjoy the journey! Write down your successes so you can remember what you did and do it again sometime. Share your favorites with your gluten-free friends (see the section on Building a Gluten-free Support Network.)
- 10) Use the internet. You can find ANYTHING. For example, I found this interesting pecan pie recipe in just a few minutes that uses no weird ingredients:

<http://glutenfreeeasily.com/easy-crustless-pecan-pie/>

Eating out

Finding new regular restaurants was probably the hardest part of the celiac journey for me. It was difficult giving up my favorite places because there was just nothing there I could safely eat.

Having to do loads of research on restaurants tends to kill spontaneity, but having a safe dining experience is totally worth it, especially after your system adjusts to a gluten-free environment.

The good news is that you can find places that either already gracefully handle gluten (and other food) sensitivities or who will want to be able to meet your needs. There will be bumps along the way, so just acknowledge that up front, and when it happens, you'll remember that it was inevitable. I do strongly advise you to look at your gluten-free diet as an adventure and to rejoice when you have a great and safe meal out. When you have a bad experience, you can attempt to work with the restaurant or just move on. If you choose to educate restaurant staff, be aware that for some it will be a lost cause. I've seen a lot of people get stuck in a place of being angry, which is just plain bad for your health. Anger has been linked to heart disease and a suppressed immune system. Don't make yourself sick while trying to keep yourself healthy!

So, here are my tips for finding restaurants that can accommodate your GF needs, followed by my tips about how to handle dining at a restaurant that you didn't have a chance to check out first.

Research

1. Use all available technology. The internet has shrunk the world, and if you were able to download this book, you can certainly do some GF restaurant sleuthing from your living room, office, or on the go with your smart phone. There are a number of recently developed apps, one which I especially like while looking for a restaurant on road trips: www.findmeglutenfree.com. I also really like www.urbanspoon.com. I identify the location and use the "Gluten-Free Friendly" feature. From here, you can read more about the restaurants, sometimes get a menu, get address and phone information, and proceed from there.
2. Look for blog posts. We gluten-free bloggers seem to be everywhere, and we tell people about our good (and bad) restaurant experiences.
3. Ask others. When traveling to an unfamiliar city, ask for recommendations on the [Celiac listserv](#). This list is a great resource for a lot of reasons, but I've found it to be very helpful in

scoping out food options in various locations. I've even found some new options in my hometown of Philadelphia that I didn't know about! The best way to find a GF-friendly place is to talk to others who have eaten there. Find bloggers and websites for your area. Do a public service and create your own to help others in your area.



Image courtesy of David Castillo Domenici at freedigitalphotos.net

Interacting with the Restaurant

Once you've identified a likely spot to eat, it's important to call ahead, and if at all possible, not during busy times. I typically ask for an owner/manager/shift supervisor, and I get her/his name. I introduce myself and explain that I want to eat at their place but need a vegetarian, gluten-free dining experience. I will clarify that gluten-free is a medical necessity and not a dietary preference, and I explain what kind of vegetarian I am. Once we weed out all of the fish-centric choices, I get a sense of whether I will have many (or any) choices. If they aren't forthcoming with reassurances that there is plenty of safely-prepared GF vegetarian fare for me, I begin to ask questions like:

- What do you do to keep the gluten-free foods away from gluten-containing foods? (I usually don't start my questions with a sentence that contains the word "contamination.")
- Is there anything I need to say to the server (counter person) when ordering to make sure I get a meal that's safe for me to eat?
- Do I need a reservation? Can you make a note about my needs? Should I ask for you when I arrive?

If I feel uncertain that I will be treated well, I will choose a different restaurant. If this is a restaurant that I didn't pick but which I need to go to anyway (like a work lunch) and I don't have great confidence, I will get an unadorned salad or ask if I can get plain steamed vegetables. I may actually eat before I go so that I don't spend the work lunch being annoyed and cranky if I don't think there is something safe for me to eat.

Assert your needs when you arrive. Sometimes I ask for the person I talked to on the phone. The personal connection and the opportunity to really appreciate their help and support can go a long way in getting a meal that is safe. With the server, I tell them my needs, and I will usually "deputize" them by asking them to steer me away from anything that may have wheat, rye or barley or soy sauce or other sauces that may have ingredients they are not familiar with. I've generally gotten great treatment when I go this route. And, when I take a gamble on food that sounds like it should be safe but I haven't gone through the whole routine with the server, I've been glutened and I've truly regretted it. If I feel like I'm being treated without care, I will ask for the manager or owner. I may choose to leave. If I can't leave, I may choose to not eat. When I feel like I've been treated well and with care, I tip very well, I blog about it, post it on Facebook, and tell everyone who will listen! Don't keep your positive experiences a secret. The restaurant deserves to be rewarded with repeat and new business. And, the good news is that once you find a place that you like that you can safely eat at, stick with it and enjoy!

One challenge I continue to have is navigating restaurants where the primary language of the staff is not English or if I haven't found them listed in a GF friendly guide of some sort. Soy sauce is my big worry in Chinese and other Asian restaurants, unknown thickeners in Indian restaurants. The main bread of Ethiopian food is Injera which is made from teff, so I have ventured to an Ethiopian place and had a great meal, but language was still a big enough

challenge that I didn't have great confidence that cross-contamination wasn't afoot. I do eat vegetarian sushi (if you eat other sushi, watch out for crab – if it's artificial it's likely not gluten-free) and I take my own bottle of GF tamari sauce since my usual place doesn't have it. I don't get the miso soup, and I don't eat the salad dressing. I keep a couple of packets of GF tamari in my purse and backpack (Pei Wei ALWAYS gives me about 4 times more than I can use with the steamed veggies and brown rice I get at their place), just in case there is a sushi emergency.

Here are some of my restaurant stories – the good, the bad, and the mixed.

The Good: Old Town Diner

I arrived in Albuquerque for a conference. For traveling, I used all my typical strategies for happy eating for the trip across the country. I got in very late at night, and so didn't have much chance to verify the locations of the restaurants that came up on my "UrbanSpoon Gluten Free Vegetarian 87104" search. And, in fact, not too many choices presented themselves. For breakfast the first day, I had some travel provisions and fruit provided by the conference, so my first dining challenge was lunch that day. I was on a bit of conference overload already, and didn't particularly want to eat with any of my new friends, so I decided to wander into Old Town and look for good Mexican food at a place that wasn't all of the conference goers' first stop (aka Little Anitas.) I found the perfect place: Old Town Diner. Great (for me) was that it was almost completely empty of customers, which meant I could eat without talking about work stuff.

I had in my head that I might do a taco salad sort of thing, but this is a diner, and they serve breakfast all day, and the huevos rancheros called out. The nice server came over, and after we sorted out what kind of chili sauce I wanted (I picked a mix of red and green) he asked about my tortilla choices. I told him I needed to have a gluten-free dining experience and asked if he could check to see if there was any reason to be suspicious of the corn tortillas. He said he'd check. He came back to report that the corn tortillas were fine, but that the chili sauces had some flour in them, and would I like chopped chunks of green chilis instead. Why yes! That sounds delicious!

The food was amazing. It was likely the BEST HUEVOS RANCHCHEROS I'VE EVER EATEN. The eggs came on a crispy corn tortilla that stayed delightfully crispy throughout the

meal -- never got soggy. And a soft corn tortilla came on the side. Wonderfully malleable and flavorful, and nothing like the cardboard tortillas in grocery stores. The over-medium eggs were just right, the refried beans and potatoes were very tasty. The chunks of chili gave it a delicious and distinctive New Mexico flavor. I liked the experience and the food so much that I had the exact same lunch the following day. I chatted with one of the owners, and she told me that she has friends who are gluten free, so she'd figured out how to feed them without poisoning them. She was really personable and friendly and clearly wants all their patrons to have a great dining experience. [p.s. Sadly, I think Old Town Diner didn't make it. Very sad!]

The Mixed: Mission Grill

It was a work lunch on the boss's dime. I reviewed the menu and called Mission Grill (19th and Arch, Center City Philadelphia) the afternoon before to discuss GF and vegetarian options. The chirpy young woman on the phone gave me short answers. Yes, I'd have no trouble finding gluten-free and vegetarian options. No, all of their tortillas are corn tortillas. No, the corn tortillas never occupy the same counter space as their pitas. She did not do any of the things that reassure me, like: a) indicate an awareness of gluten sensitivity and b) note that care is taken to prevent cross-contamination. She gave me little to work with and no confidence in them to meet my needs. If it had been up to me, we would have gone elsewhere. It wasn't.

All that said, the menu did have quite a few vegan and apparently GF options. I talked to the server, letting him know that I needed a GF dining experience and asking him to wave me off anything in the danger zone. Right off the bat he mentioned that their corn tortillas were 100% corn flour and he seemed a bit more committed to my positive experience than the chirpy girl was, so I felt a little better. My boss ordered chips and guacamole for the table, and I ordered the vegetarian tacos with grilled portabella mushrooms, zucchini and yellow squash. It comes open faced with rice and beans on the side. It was pretty good -- better with guacamole added -- but not terribly Mexican. If I find myself at this restaurant again, I might get this, or if I'm not with my boss and a bunch of colleagues, I might ask more questions about the southwest chili and cornbread. Or I might consider the black bean hummus served with corn tortilla chips instead of pita. It's nice to have a couple of options.

In the end, I still don't have 100% confidence that Mission Grill does GF with any intention, which opens the door to worrying about cross-contamination. If I have a choice, I'd pick a different restaurant.

Very Bad: Diner eggs (restaurant name withheld because I didn't give them a fighting chance):

Once upon a time, if you asked me what happens to my system if I accidentally eat gluten , I'd reply, "Oh, I'm pretty lucky. I just get a little gassy." And then I ate eggs at a diner for lunch without fully investigating my risk for gluten contamination.

A GF friend of mine recommended the place, and so I made the assumption that she'd eaten there before and that there would actually be something for us on the menu. Their presence on the web made it look kind of trendy and fun, but the on-line menu wasn't very robust in terms of GF vegetarian fare. Still, I soldiered along with the plan and made the mistake of not calling ahead. When I arrived, the diner didn't have a GF menu or demonstrate any actual knowledge of GF food handling. Though I had asked him for a GF menu, I didn't go through my usual GF patter with the server, which turned out to be a huge mistake. I decided to have a spinach and roasted pepper omelet. I could have had a salad. I didn't. It was easy to pin the resulting health episode on this place, since this was the only meal I'd not prepared for myself for several days. When my stomach upset began, I zeroed in on the omelets as the culprit pretty quickly.

And the stomach upset quickly turned to diarrhea which turned into excruciating abdominal pain that had me doubled over, shaking, vomiting and crying. Oh. My. God. It was terrible. After a couple of hours, the episode passed, though the effects lingered for the better part of a week. Maybe longer.

I don't blame the restaurant. I was careless and knowingly took a gamble. Now that I know just exactly what can happen, I will not make that mistake again.

The Sublime, if you can afford it!

A friend of mine who is gluten free recently put me in touch with the service director at a five-star restaurant in Manhattan. My friend is a true connoisseur of service and regaled me with an

amazing tale of impeccable care when she ate at this restaurant. It made me want to know more about exactly how fine restaurants navigate food sensitivities in a way that makes someone like my friend rave and rave.

The service director (she asked that I not include her name or the name of the restaurant, which puzzles me, but perhaps they need to maintain the mystique about the way they provide amazing service) gave me a behind-the-scenes peek into the world of customer care in fine dining:

"Here is what we do as a restaurant to help support our celiac friends and allow them to still have fun and experience the same level of service as guests without dietary restrictions: We ask every guest about preferences, allergies, and dietary restrictions as they are speaking with their Captain about the menu. This means that no individual guest is singled out while speaking about what they would prefer to not have during that meal.

In the event that a guest lets us know that they have a gluten allergy, we immediately let the kitchen know and the modification is placed on every course through the computer such that everyone in the kitchen is aware of the allergy. The manager is also informed of the allergy. This allows everyone in the restaurant to be completely comfortable with our ability to follow through with preferences.

Specifically for gluten allergies, we have four different gluten-free breads that we feature here. It is our belief that guests with gluten allergies should actually receive a better service (for bread) than their gluten-full counterparts. Guests who have our typical bread receive only one type of bread. Guest with gluten allergies receive four types of bread. Our gluten-free bread comes from Everybody Eats. They are a fantastic company specializing in gluten-free products. Often, guests who can eat gluten get a bit jealous of our gluten-free bread service and end up trying some themselves."

Mostly Bad, but in a clueless sort of way

I worked as a manager of a Roy Rogers restaurant (remember them?) in the early 1990's. It was the worst job I've ever had, but I did get some amazingly funny anecdotes that I still get to tell,

and I got a huge insight into race and class issues, and techniques used for getting over on one's employer (so many different ways to steal!). Now that I have to navigate a gluten-free existence, working at Roy's was a gift in that I gathered loads of data on ways that food prep in the fast food world can lead to cross contamination. As a result, I will never eat at a burger-and-fry-centric fast food place again.

First, I have to note that I was in my twenties and to my eye at the time, the food wasn't that unhealthy (my 48-year-old eye has a different opinion, of course.) The chicken was just chicken and we had a dedicated staff person whose sole job was to bread and fry it all day and evening long. If the restaurant was slow some evening, we did let it sit in the warming window longer than company specifications allowed, but I wasn't allowed to give it to the co-workers (lest they start over producing in order to get the food themselves), so we would have to throw it away and we had to count the waste at the end of the shift, which counted against me as the manager who made the call on how much chicken to make. The burgers were just ground meat (albeit already formed into patties and frozen for shipping). Sausage and bacon was the same as in the grocery store. The rolls came on big racks every other day and looked exactly the same as rolls I bought at the time for home consumption. The fries just looked like potatoes to me (the more I read about fast food fries now, I wonder what the heck was really in them). We cut up tomatoes and lettuce and onions every morning and afternoon for use on the fixin's bar and for tossed salads. The biscuits were hand mixed and rolled (breakfast) or scooped (lunch and dinner) all day long. The oil in the fryers was vegetable oil that we cleaned daily and changed on a regular schedule.

Some items were pre-fab: The roast beef came pre-cooked, but we sliced it down wafer thin and heated it in pre-packaged au jus for the roast beef sandwiches. The chicken breasts for chicken sandwiches came frozen with char lines painted on. The instructions were to microwave them, but I would throw mine on the 2-sided grill and drop the platen on it for a few seconds to heat them through for a more tender offering. The chicken nuggets and fried chicken patties and hash browns all came frozen and were fried in the same fryers as the French fries. The eggs for scrambling came out of a carton. The pancakes came pre-made and were microwaved in their plastic clamshells.

I supervised a 65-year-old Cambodian lady for whom English was almost non-existent. She made great biscuits and introduced me to a funny kind of broom that was great for cleaning under tables that the company told me to get rid of but which we kept using anyway. I had two shift supervisors. One was a 55-year-old hard-living alcoholic who would blow her paycheck on booze every Friday night and show up first thing Saturday morning looking all askew in her clothes from the day before, and I was always so grateful to have her there (running short-handed on the weekend was the pits!) My other shift supervisor was a 16-year-old over-achiever who got straight A's at Girls High. I supervised work-release inmates, budding mobsters, moms who had 5 kids, and a few men in their 20's who had no real skills and no real promise for a better life. I was 28, a middle class, college educated lesbian. The store was located at Broad and Snyder near a subway stop and a public high school and two hospitals in South Philadelphia. South Philly is a melting pot of races and cultures, but for the most part, though I lived just a few blocks away, I was not a typical denizen of the 'hood.

My motto for my shifts was “Make every item as if you were preparing it for your grandmother,” or “Clean the dining room/bathroom as if your favorite aunt were coming to visit.” This resonated with some, but frankly, not everyone has the gene for good service. And as the manager, especially in a shop where labor hours were carefully watched, I'd end up at a station, like the cash register, for long stretches, so it was hard to keep an eye on what was going on behind the line in the food prep area all the time.

I give all that background to note the huge disconnect between a company's policies around food handling and the realities of food prep at the actual store. If I worked at Roy's under the same conditions today and they told me to dedicate a fries-only fryer in order to not cross-contaminate the oil, I would not have any confidence when the restaurant was busy that a co-worker wouldn't drop a load of fries into the contaminated fryer to speed things up. Fries are way more popular than nuggets or chicken sandwiches, and the line is long, and who's really going to know, right? And what about the fry baskets? If a co-worker accidentally pours a bag of frozen fries into the nuggets basket causing cross-contamination, they are not going to throw all of those out on the off-chance that someone with a gluten issue might wander in. And then, depending on where they end up frying them, they've just contaminated either that load of fries or the whole GF-dedicated fryer, the warming bin for cooked fries, and the fry scoop.

And as far as items from the grill, I can't imagine how they wouldn't be cross-contaminated. At the very minimum, an employee can get fresh gloves and a clean spatula and maybe even wipe down the grill, but midday cleaning of a hot grill in my experience was either just scraping grease into the grease trough with the same spatula or maybe pouring seltzer water over the grill and then scraping it down. Even if bread is not ever technically on the grill, spatula contact from burger to bun is how it's done. And, as with my chicken breast sandwich prep for personal consumption, I'm living proof that employees don't always follow company regulations.

In my restaurant, the veggie prep area was separate from all of the chicken breading and biscuit making and hot food cooking, so it would have been the zone least likely to experience cross-contamination. Not all restaurants have that luxury of space, so I wouldn't count salads as a sure bet, but I suppose I might gamble and eat a tossed salad from a fast food place if I really had to, as long as it didn't have croutons and the dressing came in a packet with a list of ingredients (or no dressing all together.)

So, in the end, I applaud any corporate efforts to accommodate the needs of GF patrons. Even if I don't believe I can eat safely in these restaurants and cannot recommend that anyone with celiac disease eat there either, they are raising awareness both with their employees and the general public about gluten issues.



Image courtesy of digitalart at freedigitalphotos.net

Travel

For the most part, the rules about planning ahead and always knowing where your next meal/snack is coming from couldn't be more true. While traveling, there is nothing fun about having to endure an unexpected flight delay without food you know you can eat safely. And for road trips, it can be a real struggle to a) find GF foods at the restaurants along your route, and b) have any real trust that your truck stop waiter didn't just pick the croutons off the salad you ordered "without." Maybe someday in the near future, chain restaurants and fast food joints will all offer a reliably safe GF menu, but until then, you'll need to take matters in your own hands for eating while traveling.

As you can probably guess, this means that you'll need to pack it in. Since airlines don't offer much in the way of food any more, no one will look twice when you pull out your tasty, carefully planned snack or meal to eat en route. Whether you've got a simple PB&J on GF bread

and an apple or more elaborate fare, you will be very happy that you know that it's safe because either you made it or because it came from a trusted source. And, chances are you will like it.

I recommend that you make actual food for your trip, rather than relying on Lara Bars or GF cereal bars for a couple of reasons. First, I find that the bars are high in calories and for something that's got 300+ calories, I want more volume. Second, which sort of relates to the first, I find that I eat the bars in about 20 seconds, and then all my culinary amusement is over. If you are on a 5-hour plane ride, there's no big rush. Third, there's the psychological component. If you are feeling deprived or hungry or sorry for yourself when you get to a stopover or even your final destination, you may be more likely to take unnecessary gluten risks. You may find yourself wondering, "Does that variety of frozen yogurt have gluten in it?" The truth is that it might, but if you are tired, hungry and crabby, you'll be more likely to decide it's probably fine, and frankly, having an ugly bout of diarrhea while on vacation or at that work conference is not a great way to spend your time.

I also recommend that you pack WAY more than you think you need. Of course, this could just be a reflection of my special relationship with food, but it all harkens back to the notion of knowing where your next meal or snack will come from. And if you plan well, it's food you can eat after you've reached your destination too. If you've got the room, pack 'em up!

The rules for car travel are similar, only you can have more options because unless you drive a Miata, you have room to pack a cooler, which expands your options and likely increases the quality of your meals. For example, you CAN pack a hummus, tomato and lettuce sandwich on Udi's GF bread for a plane trip, but it will be damp and mushy. On a car trip, you can pack all the ingredients separately and assemble your meal when you are ready to eat it. Much nicer presentation, for sure! Another advantage is that depending on how long you will be traveling, you can save some food money that you'd have to spend if you are flying. In the car, you can pack ample peanut butter and jelly and bread have enough to last. Plus, you will be saving money (and probably some time) by eating your own food on the road rather than stopping at restaurants along the way.

Once you get there: Before your trip, you want to have researched your destination for GF food friendliness. Some locations will be much more accommodating than others. Personally, I never

loved New York until my first trip there post-diagnosis. There are SO many great, gluten-savvy places to eat! I felt almost like a regular person again. On the converse, my trip to visit my family in Oklahoma was a study in making do and doing without. The only safe meals I ate there were meals I fixed myself.

To aid your research, I've found the BEST resource is UrbanSpoon.com. You can plug into your browser the following key words: UrbanSpoon, Gluten-free, and the name of the city. If it's a big place, you may need to know the name of the neighborhood to help narrow the search. You can sort in a number of ways.

International travel is the same, only more so. I travelled to Paris for a week in October of 2012 and was able to eat well and safely the whole time. Here are my top tips for international travel. I've adapted it from my [Top 10 Travel Tips for Paris](#) article.

1. Rent an apartment with a functioning refrigerator and stove. Having a freezer and oven are great too! For Paris we found our place through a friend, but I recommend that you check out Vacation Rental by Owner – www.vrbo.com – to find a place. The key reason an apartment is great is that you can make your own breakfast and pack snacks or an interesting second meal for when you are out and about. My key rule is always know where your next meal or snack is coming from, and when in an unfamiliar city without a great command of the language, having your own food is critical.

2. Request the special meal on the plane, but pack your own food too. For Paris we booked on-line and there is no way with USAir to order a special meal without calling them up. You have to find the secret phone number (the info is here: <http://shopping.usairways.com/en-US/traveltools/intheair/foodandbeverages/specialmeals.html>). They do offer a gluten-free special meal, but nothing for gluten-free vegetarians, so if you are a vegetarian like me, you will certainly want to pack your own food anyway. On the way there I traded my fish for my friend's fruit salad. On the way home, I ate the rice but left the chicken breast. The main meal they served, if you are omnivorous, looked pretty good. Their supplemental snacks near the end of the flights were a pretty sad affair by anyone's standards.

3. In addition to your food for the plane, pack gluten-free provisions. I packed plenty of gluten-free on-the-go-type foods in the suitcase that I checked which was great, since navigating label-reading at the grocery store and finding equivalent products at the health food store were a bit of a challenge. Udi's bagels were a must (I also packed my toaster sleeve!)

4. Find a grocery store and/or health food store and various outdoor markets to see what culinary life at your destination is like, and to buy the GF staples on your list.

5. Take a cutting board and appropriate utensils. Our apartment was great, but the cutting boards and spoons were all wooden and could have been a big source of cross-contamination. I made due without getting a new cutting board, but I did buy a plastic spatula that I could use on the non-stick pans at the apartment without worry. I brought it home and now I think of Paris every time I use it.

6. Purchase or download a card to hand to wait staff at restaurants explaining celiac and the gluten-free diet in the language of your country of destination. Check out www.triumphdining.com.

7. Before you go, see if you can get/make a list of gluten-free friendly restaurants by neighborhood with notes about hours and days, and follow them on Facebook. Unsurprisingly, their websites and Facebook pages may not be in English. Since I don't speak French I was reluctant to call ahead and we trekked to a couple of places that weren't open. Get over this fear and save yourself many extra miles on your already tired feet! Carry your list around with you. If you are going to Paris, you can get my go-to list [here](#).

8. Have a plan each day. It's much less stressful if you know when and where your meals are coming from each day. Even if you don't decide until the night before or the morning of, have a concrete picture of how you expect to get your nutritional needs met safely. If you don't plan and get hungry while you are out and about, you are more likely to make risky decisions.

9. Take pictures of the food, the place and the menu to help you remember where you had the best success. Post them on-line! Sell your list on Fiverr.com! Tell others in the gluten-free

community where you had success so that we can live vicariously through you and we can collectively have pleasantly memorable international travel experience.



Big Healthy Lunch Salad from my ecookbooklet [So What CAN You Eat? Gluten-Free Paleo Vegan \(mostly\) Recipes for Health and Weight Loss](#) and also highlighted on the [Clairebakerok YouTube channel](#)

Managing Your Weight on the GF Diet

I've met some people with celiac disease that were always rail thin until they started the GF diet. Once they eliminated gluten, their guts healed and they had a welcome weight gain. For adults, the only one I've met that were happy about this were men. And I'm close to people who have gone gluten-free and lost a significant amount of weight. There are a couple of things going on here.

First, with celiac, by definition our small intestines are damaged and cannot absorb all the nutrients we present to it. When we start the GF diet and our gut heals, we absorb more and may actually gain weight.

On the other hand, when we start eating less refined wheat, rye and barley products and stop drinking beer, we cut a lot of calories out of our diet UNLESS we replace those calories with gluten-free substitutions, which tend to have fewer nutrients (because they aren't fortified) and they have more fat and sugar make it taste more like the food it is replacing. If we cut out gluten but add white rice, GF cakes, pretzels, breads, GF beer (or other alcohol) and the like, we are increasing the calories we are taking in while our bodies are becoming better at absorbing the food.

On the other, other hand, when we go gluten-free, many of us feel much better and have more energy, making it possible to increase our exercise levels and even enjoy it more. We are able to increase our caloric expenditure without a lot of stress.

Weight gain and loss is all about the calories our bodies absorb versus the calories we expend. Because there are so many variables at work at the same time, it takes a little while after going on the GF diet to figure out what might happen with you. But here are some sure bets:

If you go gluten free and have a 1 to 1 replacement of your former bread/pasta/baked goods intake with GF bread/pasta/baked goods with no other adjustments to your diet or exercise routine, you will gain weight.

If you go gluten-free and essentially eliminate breads/pastas/baked goods without replacing them with GF products, you will likely be taking in fewer calories, but you may be absorbing more calories from other foods once your gut heals (if you had intestinal damage to begin with.) You'll have to wait and see what happens, and adjust accordingly.

There are many tools out there now to help you monitor your caloric intake and output regardless of whether your goal is to gain or lose weight. They are basically ways to accurately log your food and its caloric value and log your exercise and how many calories you expend. *Lose It!*, *Fit Bit*, Jillian Michael's *On-line Weightloss Program*, *Sparkspeople*, *PeerTrainer*, et al, help you log and monitor your calories in and out. I have found it very helpful in identifying meals I thought were pretty moderate in calories, but which turned out to be quite high in calories.

In my case, I was always a bit overweight and about a year before I was diagnosed with celiac, I decided to get serious about losing some pounds. I joined an on-line weight loss and support

group from [Peertrainer called Point of No Return](#), did a lot of reading, got some great ideas and strategies, and successfully lost 30 pounds over the course of 6 months. I went from 155 pounds and a size 12-14 to 125 pounds and a size 4-6. I was thrilled! I hadn't been that weight since probably 6th grade.

To make the change and make it sustainable, I decided to follow the advice of Dr. Joel Fuhrman, who wrote the books [Eat to Live](#) and *Eat for Health*. He advocates for a diet much richer in vegetables, especially green leafy ones, and fruit, with nuts, seeds, beans and tofu as protein sources. He advises that animal products are generally not healthy especially when eaten at the levels that those following the Standard American Diet (SAD) eat them. And he recommends drastically reducing the amount of processed and refined carbs, i.e. breads, pasta, cakes, cookies, etc. My diet when starting out was vegetarian, but fairly cheese-centric. I decided that I would eliminate dairy and eggs from my diet until I got to a weight that suited me. I essentially became a vegan, eating lots of fruits and veggies, staying away from cheese. I continued to eat some bread and pasta. Veggie burgers were my go-to quick dinner, and when my partner fixed pasta, it was a meal we could all enjoy together as a family (my family is vegetarian, but didn't make the switch to veganism just because I did.) The [Eat to Live](#) approach to diet worked, I lost the weight, and I had every intention of staying vegan and keeping the weight off.

Then I got diagnosed with celiac disease and learned that I had several nutritional deficiencies. I decided to yield a bit on the veganism in order to work more nutrients into my diet. Now I eat eggs occasionally and have low- or no-fat dairy in the form of cottage cheese or yogurt. And if you've read my product reviews, you know I haven't cut out all gluten-replacement foods. I do like salty snacks and sweets and it is a challenge for me to eat healthfully all of the time. I am on a quest for the best GF pizza, both in restaurants and GF pizza crust mixes and frozen crusts. And I've gained back 10 pounds. At my height, 135 is not unhealthy. But still, it's something I have to watch, especially now that I know my small intestine is absorbing better than when I was actively losing the weight.

By logging my meals and using support and resources like *PEERtrainer* and *Lose It!* I also noted that I could negate the calories burned in my typical 40 minute run or circuit workout in the morning with one Lara Bar. And frankly, the Lara Bar usually doesn't taste that good or satisfy

my appetite. When I'm not under undue stress, I have strong resolve and a glass of water or a cup of tea will hold me through the afternoon until I can have my typical dinner of beans and greens or lentil stew or something high in veggies and low in refined carbs and oils, which has fewer calories but is way more food and way more nutritious.

My ecookbooklet, [*So What CAN You Eat? Gluten-free Paleo Vegan \(mostly\) Recipes for Health and Weight Loss*](#) is filled with some of my favorite healthy food options, and I include many recipes (some healthier than others) on my website and blog at www.clairebakerok.com.



Image courtesy of David Castillo Domenici at freedigitalphotos.net

Finding Support

Finding or creating support if you are new to Celiac (or even if you're not!)

While I rely on social media and the internet for support, I have done the majority of my celiac community-building in person. Either way, it can be challenging to finding kindred celiac spirits out there. In this section, I offer some key techniques gleaned from my work in community organizing to help you find or build a community of your own.

From personal experience, I know that there is a certain amount of freaking out upon getting that initial diagnosis -- after all, life as we know it, dietarily speaking, abruptly comes to an end. The kitchen becomes a minefield. Restaurants are new gauntlets to run. We think that without the traditional stuffing and pumpkin pie recipe the holidays are ruined. And then, little by little, we settle into our "new normal" and begin figuring out how to manage it all. One great aid in having

a pleasant journey is traveling it with family and friends who either “get it” or who support us, anyway.

But not everyone has a supportive base of family and friends. Some folks don’t get it. Numerous examples abound out there. Here’s a [recent one](#) posted at <http://glutendude.com>. Sad, but it happens. And what if your closest circle of supporters WANTS to help but doesn’t know how, and you don’t have the energy to educate all of them while you are trying to educate yourself at the same time?

We all need to know that we are not in this alone. We all want to have a space where we don’t have to explain it. And just as important, we need to find a way to be able to help others and share the gifts of our own experience. There are a number of ways to approach finding and building a supportive network. And there is a lot of good advice on the internet about how to find a support group. In brief, here are my best bets to find existing support.

- Ask the doctor or practice that identified your celiac for information about support groups. Hospitals with a strong GI focus may also host a group or know of one.
- Check the Gluten Intolerance Group website for a branch near you: <http://www.gluten.net/local-branches.aspx>
- Google “Celiac Support Group” and the name of your city or region and see what comes up.
- Go to www.meetup.com and see if there is a gluten-free or celiac meetup group near you. It’s free and easy to lots of different kinds of affinity groups.
- Seek support on-line. Twitter is a great way to connect for conversation though it does take a little getting used to (you are limited to 140 characters per tweet, and just because you tweet something doesn’t necessarily mean someone will tweet back.) Be sure and “follow” GFDougie and Clairebakerok!
- Join the celiac listserv and ask them about a group in your area. Though it is a little old school, the celiac listserv is huge, with people from all over. The collective knowledge and experience in that group is astounding and is underutilized in the celiac community.

Learn more [here](#) and send an email with the word “Subscribe” to CELIAC-subscribe-request@LISTSERV.ICORS.ORG.

You did all of these things and still came up with nothing? Don't give up! You can start your own support group. I started [Gluten-free Delaware County](#) (GFDC) to fill a gap I found in my region. To start your own group, you'll need to have some patience and perseverance. Nothing gets created overnight, and it will take a bit of work to grow and keep it invigorated, but the payoff you'll get in support and new friends is well worth it. And you'll have the satisfaction of being there when others who are newly diagnosed or new to your area need what you were looking for not that long ago. Here are my steps for creating and sustaining a group of your own:

1. Decide what kind of group you want
2. Pick a place, date and time for your first gathering
3. Find the people and invite them
4. Follow through, even if only one other person shows up
5. Work with the people who show up to help decide the details of the next gathering
6. Do it all over again

Decide what you want. Mutual support? Informational/educational meetings? Potlucks? Restaurant outings? I created Gluten-free Delaware County (GFDC) to be mostly fun, mutual support, and food-centric. I thought at first we'd meet at a community space and do potlucks or something, but after I hit a roadblock with finding a welcoming and free space, I modified my first gathering to be a weekend lunch at a chain restaurant that had a gluten-free menu. My real goal was getting people together, and I figured I could get ideas for a potluck or presentation venue from the group.

Pick a place, date and time for your gathering. As described in the highly scientific approach above (har har). The important thing is to just decide, but give yourself enough lead time on the date you select so that you have time to reach out to others who may be interested. And since you will be reaching out to people you don't know, for personal safety reasons you may want to meet in a public place, at least for your first couple of gatherings.

Find the people and invite them. Make a flyer and take it to your doctor's office, the local health food store, chiropractor, yoga studio. Tell them what you are doing, ask if you can make the flyer available and if they would share the info with the other patients/clients/customers. Talk about it with your friends – it seems like more and more people know other people who are eating gluten-free these days. Ask if it can be posted in your church bulletin or local community newspaper. Put a flyer up in the library or at the store or the hair dresser's. See if you can visit other community meetings taking place to either announce it or put it in their newsletter. Of course, you don't need to use all of these methods, but the important thing is to get the word out.

Use technology to find others. This is a great option if you live in a bigger place or are shy and have a hard time with the personal favor-asking of the person-to-person method. Use the celiac listserv, create a group at www.meetup.com (I did this. It costs \$12 a month to start a group, but it was a fast and easy way to reach a lot of people, and I could work on it at crazy hours.) Try Craig's List. Email your friends and ask them to forward it to people they know who may be interested. Post it on Facebook. Maybe your town has an electronic bulletin board for activities. Encourage RSVPs so that you have an idea of how many people to expect and then plan your gathering accordingly. [For my first GFDC Meetup, I was really nervous that the group would be stiff and awkward. I discovered that celiac and gluten-free living is a GREAT icebreaker! You start out already having something in common with the other guests, and the conversation flows from there.]

Follow through. Even if you only have one RSVP, host your event anyway. You don't know if someone else will show up unannounced, and you don't want to lose the interest of the one person who did commit to attending. It can be discouraging, but it takes time to build a solid and interested group. Be sure and engage your small group in thinking about the specifics of the NEXT gathering. Just know that not everyone can come every time, so stay with it and don't take low attendance personally. Just work on your outreach strategy and know that making those one-on-one connections is so important that it's worth putting up with a couple of small gatherings once in awhile.

Ask the other participants what they would like. At the GFDC gatherings, I usually ask folks for ideas for where and when to meet next, and it's great not only for generating ideas, but for keeping the conversation going. The more people are involved in the decisions for the group, the more ownership they will feel toward it and the more likely they are to keep coming back.

Plan the next one. Even if you set a specific time and place each month or week for your gatherings, you'll have better success if you continue to bring the same rigor to planning each one. And once you are rolling, you can ask other members or participants of the group to help get the word out to their networks and connections. It builds from there. Also consider asking someone in the group to help you with planning and logistics. This will help you keep from burning out and let you miss a meeting from time to time without the gathering falling apart. With GFDC we don't have a set schedule, but I do try to schedule a gathering at least once a month, so I can flex it with my schedule and avoid conflicts with other happenings, holidays, etc. Just as you have taken control of your health and well-being by adopting the gluten-free diet, you can take control of finding or building a support system. It can take a bit of work, but the rewards are enormous and your universe of people who get it will widen immensely.



Scalloped Potatoes and Kale from [So What CAN You Eat? Gluten-free, Paleo, Vegan \(mostly\) recipes for Health and Weight Loss](#)

Conclusion

Life sentence or blessing in disguise?

“You have got to be kidding me.” Those were the first words out of my mouth when the hematologist told me he thought I might have celiac disease. I had heard of celiac disease, but I had compartmentalized it in my brain as a weird, maybe psychosomatic thing. I knew that it required drastic food restrictions, but beyond that, I didn’t know much.

As I proceeded through months of testing to determine if it were really so, I learned a lot about celiac and the gluten-free diet, primarily that there is gluten EVERYWHERE, and that the only way to address celiac disease was to go on a gluten-free diet FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE. I was a little freaked out. Okay, I was a LOT freaked out.

Still, committed to my long-term health, I embarked on the GF diet. I felt sorry for myself. Never again could I safely eat in a restaurant (or so I thought). I'd have to give up all of my favorite foods in the world with no reasonable replacement (or so I thought). No more pizza, no more Chinese food, no more vegetarian steak sandwiches, no more cookies. Never again a "real" birthday cake. Poor me!

But then a crazy thing happened. I grudgingly started the gluten-free diet and suddenly the gastrointestinal issues (gas and bloating – apparently not everyone enjoys them every day) went away. I had no idea that my "normal" was other people's "feeling lousy." My afternoon brain fog lifted – I thought I was just suffering from age-related memory issues. I never got another canker sore! Okay, maybe this gluten-free stuff was going to be okay.

Shopping and eating out were still a problem though. I did not approach it with relish. (And no, not all relishes are gluten-free, har har.) I had been a student of using techniques to raise my happiness set point (keeping a gratitude journal, looking for the gift of any situation, approaching a challenge as an adventure rather than an obstacle), and realized I was looking at the perfect opportunity to practice my happy skills. Here's how I reframed my thinking:

Before: I can't eat anything!

After: Good thing I LOVE vegetables, lentils, beans, rice, and quinoa since they are naturally gluten-free.

Before: I'll NEVER be able to go to my favorite restaurants again.

After: I get to explore a whole new world of restaurants that I might never have tried otherwise.

Before: My family is going to think I'm a huge pain in the neck.

After: I've returned to cooking, which I enjoy.

Before: Other people are going to think I'm a huge pain in the neck.

After: I can figure out a way to take care of my health and model appropriate self-advocacy and self-assertiveness for others.

Before: None of my friends will want to eat out with me or have me over.

After: I can figure out ways to make it easy for them, AND I can find or create a new circle of friends who get it.

You get the idea. I have come up with a whole bunch of new favorite recipes and figured out which of my old favorites were already or could be adapted to be gluten-free. I've devised strategies for finding gluten-free friendly restaurants. I've honed my vocabulary to describe my dietary needs to make sure I don't get glutened while eating out or at a friend's house. I formed a gluten-free meet-up group to find others who are in the same boat. I can be a coach and advocate for others who are learning to live gluten-free.

And how wonderful is it that I have a disorder that can be completely controlled by diet alone? No lifetime regimen of pharmaceuticals! And so cool that I can rely on healthful fruits, veggies, beans, nuts, seeds and novel (to me) grains to help maintain a healthy weight! Celiac is actually a blessing! Why was I ever so distraught? I have taken on the quest for the perfect gluten-free pizza (in restaurants, mixes, and frozen), my family can display their love and support for me by learning to read labels and looking out for me at restaurants and making me gluten-free cake for my birthday, and I can make a difference in the lives of others.

Frankly, at this point, I wouldn't change a thing. What started out as a life sentence was really the beginning of a whole new and exciting chapter in my life, a new adventure in my journey to happy and healthy.

There You Have It

Gluten-free living is an adventure. Some days I feel like Indiana Jones making my way through tarantulas and snakes and generally coming out unscathed (or at least not too bunged up) in the end. Of course there are frustrating times, like when I added some extra fiber to my breakfast smoothie, only to read the package after I'd mixed everything up and learned that there was

wheat in it. The good news is that I read the label BEFORE I drank it, so the only loss was a blender full of food. You will not believe how excited you will be to have a new gluten-free dining find, or happy to learn that a manufacturer has started marketing a new GF product that you love, or delighted to find a new blog or recipe that is spot on with you and your likes and tastes.

If you still have questions, are interested in one-on-one coaching, or would just like to let me know how you're doing, please contact me at Claire@clairebakerok.com. I would enjoy hearing from you. Remember, we are all in this together!

And if you started at the beginning and got to this page, thank you! I hope you enjoyed the journey, and I hope you learned some things that will help you or a loved one make an easier transition to a gluten-free life. This journey that I'm on, while I cannot say that it's always been fun or easy or that I haven't just sat down and cried sometimes, it has always been an adventure. And who doesn't love a good adventure?

To your happy healthy gluten-free life!



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