

What should “gluten-free” mean on a food label? A food label will indicate that an item is gluten-free if it is a food that has not been contaminated by gluten, in any form. That includes, wheat, barley, rye, oats, or any of their derivatives, which include bulgar, durum, einkorn, emmer, graham, kamut, malt, matzo, seitan, semolina or triticale.

Why? A food label needs to be this specific to justify its place in the diet of an individual with celiac disease. “Celiac disease is associated with a widerange of autoimmune diseases including insulin-dependent diabetes, dermatitis herpetiformis, autoimmune thyroid disease, autoimmune hepatitis, primary biliary cirrhosis, atrophic gastritis, gluten-related ataxia and connective tissue diseases. This has been explained by the sharing of certain common genetic factors. It has been recently discovered that the prevalence of autoimmune disorders in celiac disease is related to the duration of exposure to gluten. The longer the exposure to gluten, the greater the risk of autoimmunity developing in the other organ systems” “Celiac disease is strongly associated with osteomalacia and osteoparosis.”

(C. Robert Dahl, MD, “Celiac Disease: The Great Mimic” Lifeline, Celiac Sprue Association; Reprint from Lifeline – Spring 2001)

How do you identify foods that do not contain gluten? In order to properly identify foods that do not contain gluten, every food label must be read. Those food items that are not specific enough in detail should not be purchased.

Time spent identifying foods? All foods purchased must be identified as gluten free by a person with celiac disease. So it would follow that the entire grocery experience must be spent analyzing food labels.

What percentage of foods and which types purchased are marked “gluten-free”? Typically the diet of a celiac would include purchased foods which are labeled gluten-free 100% of the time. Most “health foods” are already marked “gluten-free”; more is necessary. If an item is commercially packaged or processed, and that item contains gluten in any form, it should always be noted in the ingredient list.

Does “gluten-free” printed on a product label influence your decision to purchase products having the same ingredients? Yes. If an item is labeled “gluten-free” with specific ingredients listed, then other items not labeled “gluten-free”, but containing the same ingredient list, should be gluten free.

To what extent?

If an item has the same ingredients as another marked gluten-free, then it should follow that the unmarked item be completely gluten-free 100% of the time.

Other comments

Any purposeful misrepresentation or non-disclosure by a manufacturer of its ingredient list should be punishable to the full extent of the law. If a food item contains substances that are “poisonous” to a specific part of the population, then it should follow that the manufacturer bears the responsibility to disclose all information about its product, including adverse affects (i.e. cigarette smoking).