



**GLUTEN
INTOLERANCE
GROUP**



Restaurant Dining: Seven Tips for Staying Gluten-Free

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Tips for Dining Away from Home

Staying gluten-free when dining out can be a source of anxiety. Many restaurants have “gluten-free” offerings, but how can you be sure that procedures are being followed to avoid cross-contamination, and that all ingredients used are truly safe?

The best approach is to choose restaurants which have been certified by GIG’s Gluten-Free Food Services (GFFS) Certification Program: www.gffoodservice.org/certified-directory/certified-food-services. GFFS works with experts in food preparation to help develop, educate, and train restaurants and other food service establishments to meet and adhere to the highest gluten-free standards.

When eating at restaurants which are not certified, following are some tips to help ensure that you dine safely.

1. Selection of eating establishment.

- Your success at gluten-free dining will be determined by a number of factors, including the type of restaurant you choose.
- Allow extra time to discuss your needs for a gluten-free meal. Fast food, quick-service restaurants, and those with a standard menu may have little time to thoroughly check ingredients.
- Finer dining establishments offer a less-hurried atmosphere and usually have more time to meet your needs.
- Call the restaurant the day before or earlier the same day. Speak to the chef to discuss your meal options. This will increase the quality of your dining experience.
- The chefs in finer dining establishments are generally aware of gluten and can be very helpful.
- Be careful in restaurants where language may create a communication barrier. Food service workers may not easily understand your dietary restrictions.

2. Dine early or late.

- Time your meal either before or after the busiest meal time. You will have more time and easier access to the people who can help you. Even the most cooperative server may not have the time you need during “rush hour.”

3. Explain your dietary restrictions briefly.

- Example: (smile)
“Hi, I may need your help with my menu selection. I am on a medically restricted diet and am unable to eat certain grain products. This includes wheat, rye, barley and foods made with these grains. I have some questions and need your help.”
- Enlisting the interest and cooperation of your server is essential. This person can be your ally or your biggest stumbling block.

More useful materials available from GIG

• **GIG Restaurant Card – The English version is a plastic credit card-sized card to carry with you at all times. It is simple yet provides helpful information to the chef and other staff.**
(www.gluten.org/product/restaurant-card/)

• **Foreign Language Restaurant Help – GIG offers similar information in several languages.**
(www.gluten.org/resources/lifestyle/foreign-restaurant-cards/)

- Medic alert bracelets help give credibility to the seriousness of your diet restrictions.

4. Ask detailed questions.

- Use the GIG restaurant card. Ask that the card be taken to the chef for more assistance in selecting safe menu items. The only person who really knows what went into a dish is the person who made it!
- You may need to ask extensive questions about the foods and preparation. Be very specific in your questions about each item.
- Below are some foods and the potential problems involved with them:

Salads: The possibility of contamination lies in the cleanliness of the boards used to chop ingredients and the addition of croutons or salad dressings containing unsafe ingredients. Ask for dressing to be served on the side. No croutons or other bread products.

Salad Dressings and Marinades: Salad dressings and marinades may contain thickeners or other unsafe ingredients. Try ordering a lemon wedge and oil on the side, wine or balsamic vinegar and oil, or bring a small container of dressing from home if you are unsure of the restaurant's salad dressing.

Soups and Sauces: Soup bases are often used as a foundation for soups and sauces. Bases contain ingredients comparable to bouillon or broth, i.e., hydrolyzed vegetable protein, natural flavors, etc., and should be carefully checked. Roux (pronounced "roo") is the thickening for most sauces and is a combination of butter and flour. It is safest to avoid sauces. Canned sauces are also used in some restaurants, so you may be able to check the ingredient listing. Soup base will sometimes appear in sauces.

Prime Rib and Other Meats: If prime rib is too rare for the customer's taste, the cook may "cook" it in a pot of au jus until it reaches the desired doneness. Au jus may come from a can or mix and contain unidentified hydrolyzed vegetable protein (HVP). Seasonings are often used in preparing meats; their ingredients should be verified. Self-basting turkeys and imitation bacon bits may contain HVP or textured vegetable protein (TVP) and need to be checked for safety before using.

Fried Foods: The oil used to deep-fry foods may be used for both breaded and non-breaded items, in which case they should be avoided. In large restaurants where French fries are cooked in separate fryers, there is less chance of contamination.

Rice, Starches, and Hash Browns: Many hash browns are frozen and pre-packaged with starch added. Ask what other ingredients have been added during cooking. Many rice pilafs may have seasonings or added ingredients that you may need to avoid. Plain steamed or baked rice cooked in water is a good choice.

Dairy Products: Non-dairy products are sometimes used instead of dairy products in restaurants. The three most frequently used non-dairy products are non-dairy creamer, non-dairy "sour cream" topping, and non-dairy whipped topping. Verify that the ingredients in any non-dairy substitutes are okay.

5. Have your food prepared on a clean cooking surface, with clean utensils.

Find out whether breaded or gluten-containing foods have been cooked on the surface beforehand. Suggest using foil to cook on if this is a problem.

6. Confirm your order before eating.

Is it the "special" meal you ordered? Were your instructions followed?

7. Thank your food server.

Leave a generous tip for good service and if you have an extra GIG brochure, leave it with the management for their information. Return. Patronize the establishment again!

This article has been assessed and approved by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist.

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Other helpful information is available at www.GLUTEN.org.

Advances in celiac disease are fast-paced. If this document is more than 2 years old, please visit our website for updated documents.

This information should not be used to diagnose or treat gluten-related disorders or other medical conditions. For questions about these conditions consult your healthcare team when considering this information.

Please consider your local GIG Branch as another resource.

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The Mission of the Gluten Intolerance Group is to empower the gluten-free community through consumer support, advocacy, and education.

To make a donation or become a volunteer to GIG, visit our website or call the office at 253-833-6655.