

# Coeliac disease and diabetes

Coeliac disease is a condition where intolerance to gluten causes small bowel inflammation and damage. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, barley, and oats. The only treatment for coeliac disease is a lifelong gluten-free diet.

Coeliac disease and type 1 diabetes can occur together because they are both autoimmune diseases. It's estimated that 5% of people with type 1 diabetes may have coeliac disease.

Some people with type 2 diabetes also develop coeliac disease, but the two conditions are not related.

## What are the symptoms of coeliac disease?

The symptoms of coeliac disease can vary from person to person. Symptoms may include one or more of the following:

- » diarrhoea and/or constipation
- » weight loss
- » flatulence
- » fatigue
- » abdominal bloating and cramping
- » anaemia (low iron levels)
- » fluctuating blood glucose levels.

## How is coeliac disease diagnosed?

A blood test is used to screen for coeliac disease. This test measures antibody levels in your blood. If the blood test is positive, this needs to be followed by a small bowel biopsy to confirm the diagnosis.

It is important to wait until your diagnosis is confirmed before you start on a gluten-free (GF) diet. People with type 1 diabetes may have coeliac disease without any symptoms, so screening is important to detect this condition. Ask your diabetes health care team for more information.



## Which foods contain gluten?

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and oats. If you have coeliac disease, you must avoid these grains as well as any food or drinks that contain ingredients derived from these grains. It's important that you remove all traces of gluten from your diet, as even very small amounts can cause ongoing damage to the bowel wall.

If any ingredient in a product comes from a grain that contains gluten, the Australian food standard requires that this be declared on the food packaging.

It's important to know how to read food labels if you need to follow a gluten-free diet.



Coeliac Australia produces an ingredient list booklet as well as a phone app that lists ingredients and their suitability for a gf diet. Contact Coeliac Australia for more information and for membership and support services.

## What happens if you don't follow a gluten-free diet?

If coeliac disease is left untreated, you have an increased risk of developing other medical problems. Damage to your intestine can occur even if you are eating gluten and not experiencing symptoms. This can lead to your body not being able to properly absorb essential nutrients from food.

The condition can affect other parts of the body too, increasing the risk of infertility, osteoporosis and some cancers.

Untreated coeliac disease can also make it difficult for people with diabetes to manage their blood glucose levels.

## Healthy eating for coeliac disease and diabetes

If you have coeliac disease and diabetes, healthy eating includes:

- » regular meals containing GF carbohydrates
- » low glycaemic-index (GI) foods
- » foods low in saturated fat
- » foods rich in calcium and iron
- » high-fibre food choices and plenty of fruit and vegetables.

If you have been diagnosed with coeliac disease, it is recommended that you see a dietitian with experience in managing coeliac disease and diabetes. They can help develop a healthy eating plan that is right for you.

## Gluten-free carbohydrate foods

Healthy eating for diabetes includes choosing the right type and amount of carbohydrate foods. Many commonly eaten carbohydrate foods such as breads, cereals, pasta, biscuits and crackers contain gluten, so you will need to avoid these. Look for GF carbohydrate alternatives.

The foods listed below are GF carbohydrates. Those in *italics* have a lower GI, which means they raise blood glucose levels more slowly. Including low-GI foods as part of a healthy eating plan can help manage your blood glucose levels.



### More information

Call Coeliac Australia in your state on 1300 GLUTEN (1300 458 836) or visit [coeliac.org.au](http://coeliac.org.au)

You can also buy the *Living with diabetes and coeliac disease* booklet from Coeliac Australia in your state or territory.

### Gluten-free bread

Made from rice, corn, potato or soy. Includes GF pizza bases, GF corn tortillas, GF pancakes and GF muffins

### Gluten-free breakfast cereals

GF rice flakes, GF cornflakes, GF muesli, *rice bran*, puffed rice and corn, rice porridge

### Rice

*Basmati (white or brown), Doongara™ (SunRice® Clever Rice or SunRice® Low-GI Brown Rice)*, white rice, arborio rice, brown rice, jasmine rice

### Legumes\*

*Kidney beans, chick peas, lentils, three-bean mix, butter beans, GF baked beans*

### Fruit

All types of fruit, such as *apples, oranges, peaches*, bananas and melons

### Gluten-free crispbread

Corn thins, rice cakes, corn cakes, GF crackers

### Dairy products and alternatives\*

*Milk, GF calcium fortified soy milk, GF custard, GF yoghurt and GF ice cream*

### Vegetables containing carbohydrate

Potatoes, sweet potato, *sweet corn, taro, yam, Carisma™ potato*

### Gluten-free pasta

Corn pasta, rice pasta, *rice vermicelli, rice noodles, bean thread (mungbean) noodles, buckwheat soba noodles*

### Gluten-free grains

*Quinoa, buckwheat, polenta and amaranth*

\*Always check the ingredient list to make sure the product is GF

**Note:** some varieties of these foods may come in low-GI versions. Visit [www.glycemicindex.com](http://www.glycemicindex.com) for up-to-date information.

## The NDSS and you

A wide range of services and support is available through the NDSS to help you manage your diabetes. This includes information on diabetes management through the NDSS Helpline and website. The products, services and education programs available can help you stay on top of your diabetes.

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