

Food Fact Sheet: Wheat free diet

How careful do I need to be if I have a wheat allergy?

If you have been diagnosed with a wheat allergy, you will have to be very careful with what you eat and avoid any food containing even the smallest amount of wheat. If you have a wheat intolerance you may not react to trace amounts and may not need to be so careful. You need to check with your doctor or dietitian to see how sensitive you are. Your doctor or dietitian will advise whether you also need to avoid rye, barley and oats as well as wheat.

It is also important to check with your doctor that you do not have coeliac disease (a sensitivity to gluten in wheat and other cereals) before excluding wheat. This is because the blood test that is used to diagnose coeliac disease needs enough gluten to be present in your diet for it to be accurate.

Some gluten free foods may contain wheat starch where the gluten has been removed. These are therefore not suitable if you have wheat allergy.

Also, wheat free foods may not be gluten free if they contain rye, barley or standard oats. It is important to always check labels.

Where is wheat found?

Wheat is a grain. Wheat is a main ingredient of many foods such as: breads, chapattis and naan breads, breakfast cereals, biscuits, crackers, crumpets, scones, pancakes, wafers, cakes, pizza, pasta, pastries and Yorkshire puddings. It is also found in many convenience foods such as soups, sauces, spices, malted drinks, processed meats and ready made meals.

Always check the label

Under current EU law, wheat along with other common allergens, must be clearly labelled on packaged foods and drinks. These allergens have to be clearly emphasised e.g. in bold or highlighted. For foods sold without packaging e.g. in restaurants, cafes or delicatessens, allergen information must be provided in writing or verbally.

Ingredients or foods to avoid

The following are all types of wheat or ingredients which contain wheat:

breadcrumbs	hydrolysed wheat protein	wheat bran
bulgar wheat	kamut	wheat germ
bulgar wheat	rusk	wheat gluten
durum wheat	semolina	wheat malt
einkorn, emmer, farola, freekah	spelt	wheat starch
flour/unbleached flour	triticale	whole wheat

Are there any alternatives?

There are many foods that can be used as a substitute to wheat that will provide variety to your meals and help you get all the nutrients you require from your diet.

These include:

There are now many wheat free products available to buy from supermarkets, health food shops and online.

Grains	barley, corn, maize, millet, quinoa, rice, rye buckwheat and sorghum
Flours	barley, bean, buckwheat, corn, gram, lentil, millet, pea, potato, rice, soya, oat, teff, coconut and tapioca
Flakes	barley, buckwheat, millet, rice and soya
Others	amaranth, ground nuts e.g. almonds, oats, polenta, sago, soya, tapioca and quinoa

Remember that 'wheat free' does not mean a product is gluten free as other grains contain gluten. 'Gluten free' does not mean a product is wheat free as gluten can be removed from wheat making it gluten free but all the other parts of the wheat are still there.

Useful tips

Breads: There are a wide range of brands available in supermarkets, health food shops and online. Crackers, crispbreads, rye crackers, oatcakes, corn cakes and rice cakes can be used in place of bread for meals and snacks.

Batter and breadcrumbs: are made from wheat flour. Try wheat free alternatives or finely crush cornflakes to make a good substitute for breadcrumbs.

Sausages: often contain rusk and so contain wheat but wheat free alternatives are available in supermarkets, butchers shops and meat producers at farmers markets.

Chinese and Thai dishes: containing soy sauce will contain wheat as soya sauce contains wheat. At home try a Japanese variety of soy sauce made without wheat.

Gravy: try vegetable stock or wheat free stock cubes and thicken with corn flour. If a little colouring is needed add gravy browning. Look for wheat-free instant gravy products too.

Pasta: There are many wheat free pastas available made from other grains such as corn, rice, buckwheat, bean flours or quinoa. Try not to overcook them as they may break up.

Sauces: To make sauces use a wheat free flour such as corn, rice or potato to thicken the sauce. To prevent lumps forming, first mix the flour with a little cold water. Heat the milk (or milk alternative if using) in a pan. Add a small amount of the liquid to the cold mix and stir whilst continuing to add all the liquid. Then add any flavouring e.g. cheese, parsley.

Beers and Lagers: are mostly made from barley. However some beers are made from a mix of barley and wheat and some European beers are made from wheat. Check the can or bottle to see which grains are used or contact the relevant brewery to check. There are also now many gluten free and wheat free beers available to buy but do check ingredients labels carefully.

Baking: wheat free flours have different baking properties to wheat flour but can make tasty biscuits, cakes and pastries. Be extremely accurate with weights and measures – always use scales and measuring spoons. Use a wheat free baking powder, available from most large supermarkets and health food shops.

Ready blended self-raising and plain wheat free flours are readily available. Xanthan gum is a useful ingredient that can be added to improve the texture and help to bind the mixture. When making your own pastry, chill for 20 minutes before rolling it out between two sheets of cling film to stop it from sticking. Good flour combinations are rice and soya flour or potato and polenta flour. You could also try a ready-to-roll wheat free pastry.

Summary

Wheat is found in many foods so a wheat free diet can be restrictive. Try to replace with suitable alternatives to ensure that your diet remains balanced. For further advice, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian.