



**GLUTEN  
INTOLERANCE  
GROUP™**



# Eating Out: 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-contact and that all ingredients used are truly safe?

The best approach to feeling more confident about the place where you’re dining is to choose a restaurant that has gone through GIG’s Gluten-Free Food Services (GFFS) Validation Program: [gffs.org/safe-spots/](http://gffs.org/safe-spots/). GFFS works with restaurants and other foodservice establishments, to educate, train, and audit their staff to meet - and adhere to - the highest standards for preparing gluten-free food. Once they successfully complete the program, they are validated as Gluten Free Safe Spots.

When eating at restaurants that are not validated, follow these tips to help assess the safety of what you’re ordering.

### **1. Choose the right kind of eating establishment.**

Your success at gluten-free dining is determined by several factors, including the type of restaurant you choose.

- Fast food, quick-service restaurants, and those with a standard menu may have little time to thoroughly check ingredients.
- Fast food establishments are less likely to be able to make appropriate adjustments and cross-contact could be an issue.
- Finer dining establishments offer a less-hurried atmosphere and usually have more time to meet your needs.
- 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 and where food service workers may not easily understand your dietary restrictions.

### **2. Call Ahead**

Call the restaurant the day before or earlier the same day. Speak to the

*More materials  
available from  
GIG:*

- ***GIG Restaurant Card - simple yet helpful information to share with chef and other restaurant staff.***
- ***Foreign Language Restaurant Help – GIG offers similar information in several languages.***

*[\(gluten.org/2019/10/18/foreign-restaurant-cards/\)](http://gluten.org/2019/10/18/foreign-restaurant-cards/)*

chef to discuss your meal options. This will increase the quality and safety of your dining experience.

### **3. Dine early or late.**

Time your meal either before or after the busiest mealtime. 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.”

### **4. Clearly explain your dietary restrictions.** Example:

When ordering at a food establishment, allow extra time to discuss your needs for a gluten-free meal. You could say:

“Hi, I need your help with my menu selection. I am on a medically restricted diet and am unable to eat wheat, rye, barley, and foods made with these grains. I have some questions for you or the chef.”

Enlist the interest and cooperation of your server. This person can be your ally or your biggest stumbling block when looking to identify potential gluten in menu items.

*Medic alert bracelets can help lend credibility to the seriousness of your dietary restrictions.*

### **5. Ask to have your food prepared on a clean surface with clean utensils.**

Find out if breaded or gluten-containing foods have been cooked on the same surface beforehand. Suggest using foil over the cooking surface to avoid cross-contact.

### **6. Confirm your order before eating.**

Double-check with your server that what you’ve been served is the “special” meal you ordered. Confirm that your instructions were followed to avoid gluten.

### **7. Thank your food server.**

If your server was attentive to your need to eat gluten-free and made best efforts to accommodate you, make sure to leave a generous tip for their service.

## **Your Safety is in the Details**

Paying attention to the smallest details can help you understand the riskiness of different aspects of an eating establishment. Here are a few areas where cross-contact with gluten is common but often not recognized by untrained staff.

**Salads:** Cross-contact with gluten can happen on cutting boards used to chop ingredients as well as the addition of croutons or salad dressings containing gluten.

Ask how dressings are made or if you can double-check the ingredients list. Ask for dressings to be served on the side or for oil and vinegar or lemon slices to season the salad yourself. Bring a small container of dressing from home if you are unsure of the restaurant’s salad dressing.

Emphasize not to include croutons, crackers, or other bread products, and politely send the salad back if there are croutons on top.

**Marinades and sauces:** Dressings, sauces and marinades may contain added gluten as a thickener or binding agent, or some restaurants use canned sauces so you might be able to ask to check the ingredients list on the can. If they are made on site, the chef should be able to confirm the ingredients.

**Soups and Broths:** Soup bases may be used as a foundation for soups and could be made with roux (pronounced “roo”), a combination of butter and flour. Soups could also contain could contain hydrolyzed wheat protein. Hydrolyzed wheat protein is a protein, and it is not gluten-free. Gluten is present in the protein portion of wheat.

**Meats, Poultry & Fish:** Seasonings are often used in preparing meats, poultry, and fish, and the ingredients should be verified. If prime rib is too rare for your taste, the cook may “cook” it in a pot of “au jus” until it reaches the desired doneness. Au jus could come from a can or mix and might contain hydrolyzed wheat protein.

**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 cross-contact with gluten.

**Seasoned Rice:** Some rice pilafs and seasoned rice may have added gluten-containing ingredients that you should avoid. Plain or steamed rice cooked in water is a good choice.

Check out our article, [38 Foods Where Gluten May Be ‘Hidden’](#) to learn more about less obvious and surprising sources of gluten in food.

As you can see, eating out presents a lot of challenges when you need to entirely avoid gluten. Following these tips does not guarantee a completely safe gluten-free dining experience. Look for GFFS Safe Spots for validated eating establishments that have gone through audits and training to learn how to properly prepare gluten-free fare.

*GIG COVID Disclaimer:*

*We offer tips that might mention eating at public restaurants. As with any public place, we suggest that you follow local and state COVID guidelines. [See the CDC's guidelines for eating out during COVID](#) or refer to your local/regional health department guidelines.*

This educational bulletin has been produced by the Gluten Intolerance Group of North America, a registered 501(c)3 organization. Learn more about GIG at [www.gluten.org](http://www.gluten.org).

GIG is on a mission to make life easier for everyone living gluten-free.

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