



GLUTEN
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7 Tips for Avoiding Gluten Cross-Contact at Home

Updated December 2020

The presence of gluten, the protein found in common cereal grains wheat, barley, rye, and their derivatives, can be problematic even in microscopic quantities for those with gluten-related disorders (celiac disease or non-celiac gluten sensitivity). Though the first step in treating gluten-related disorders is eliminating obvious exposures to gluten, it is also essential to avoid accidental exposure to gluten through cross-contact.

Cross-contact takes place when foods are prepared on common surfaces or with utensils and cookware that are not thoroughly cleaned after preparing gluten-containing foods. Cross-contact can happen when cooking or baking at home or take place in commercial kitchen spaces where gluten-containing flours may be airborne and settle on surfaces, utensils, and gluten-free products.

To maintain a gluten-free way of life, take steps at home when working in a shared kitchen where gluten-containing foods are also being prepared and/or eaten.

STEP 1 - Have “The Talk.” Make sure that other members of your household have a clear understanding of the importance of keeping foods and certain kitchen items gluten-free (see below).

STEP 2 – Separate your foods. When possible, create a gluten-free area in your refrigerator and/or pantry, preferably on a top shelf to avoid possible falling crumbs or dust from gluten foods. Check out our TikTok videos for refrigerator cleaning tips!

Clean Out Your Refrigerator #1 - <https://www.tiktok.com/@glutendotorg/video/6894658708148718854>

Clean Out Your Refrigerator #2 - <https://www.tiktok.com/@glutendotorg/video/6894659492038888709>

Clean Out Your Refrigerator # 3 - <https://www.tiktok.com/@glutendotorg/video/6894659884730682630>

STEP 3 – Clean carefully or keep separate. The following cooking equipment should be given extra cleaning attention before preparing a gluten-free meal or snack. You could also choose to purchase an extra set and store separately to completely avoid cross-contact with gluten:

- Wooden Utensils
- Cutting Boards
- Nonstick Pans
- Cast Iron Skillet
- Wooden Rolling Pins
- Food Storage Containers
- Waffle Irons
- Cake Pans & Muffin Tins
- Sink Sponges

STEP 4 – Inspect your appliances and utensils. Several kitchen appliances and utensils are more likely to be the culprits in accidental cross-contact with gluten. Toasters are virtually impossible to thoroughly clean, posing a significant issue for use in a shared household or when traveling. Since it could be inconvenient to have two toasters, another option is to purchase toaster bags. Toaster bags provide a barrier between items placed in the bag and the toaster itself. They can be used for breads, bagels, waffles, and more, and can be purchased online. Strainers, colanders, and flour sifters hold gluten in crevices that are very difficult to clean, posing a significant threat for cross-contact.

STEP 5 – Consider buying double of key tools. To be safe, purchase a separate set of these commonly used kitchen items and keep the new set stored away from gluten-containing foods. Similarly, plastic or wooden utensils, as well as those with non-stick coatings, may develop grooves from wear and tear that can collect gluten. Consider replacing worn items. Muffin tins and cake pans can be tricky to clean. A good solution is to use cupcake liners or parchment paper to provide a barrier.

STEP 6 – Avoid double-dipping. When using condiments, or any food item, from a reusable jar, avoid double dipping utensils or causing any other contact between the jar and gluten-containing foods. If you are in a shared kitchen, purchase double of food items like peanut butter, jam, mustard, and mayo. A money-saving option is purchasing family sized containers of condiments and then divvy them up into two separate containers, labeling one as gluten-free. Divide the condiments before first use to avoid cross-contact. Some condiments come in squeeze bottles, a simple solution to reducing the chance of cross-contact. You may need to educate others in your household on how to avoid touching the squeeze bottle tip to gluten-containing foods.

STEP 7 – Practice safe shopping and dining. Your kitchen isn't the only place cross-contact can happen. Cross-contact can occur at the grocery store, too. Stay clear of the store's bulk section where gluten-containing ingredients could linger on scoops or surrounding bins, leading to unavoidable cross-contact. Even if the scoop is in the bin of a gluten-free food, it could contain gluten particles from a previous bin or from exposure to a gluten-containing food elsewhere in the bulk bin area.

Prepared foods from a store's deli, hot bar, or salad bar are also at risk for cross-contact from the production kitchen to the food bar. Gluten-containing foods could be prepared on the same surfaces or with the same utensils as "gluten-free" items. Once prepared and displayed for sale, there can be cross-contact through spills or accidental swapping of utensils from foods containing gluten into gluten-free items. Use your best judgement to assess the safety of food items when you can't verify how they've been handled.

Be mindful of cross-contact when dining out at restaurants that have not been validated as a safe spot through a program such as GIG's Gluten-Free Food Service (GFFS) program. Call ahead and speak directly with the restaurant's staff or management to assess the risk of cross-contact. The potential sources of cross-contact in restaurants are similar to what could happen in home kitchens.

An additional source of cross-contact common to restaurants is frying oil. If a gluten-containing food is fried in oil, the used oil becomes a source of cross-contact, depositing gluten proteins on foods that would otherwise be considered gluten-free if cooked in the same oil.

By knowing the facts about cross-contact and communicating with others, you can more successfully avoid coming into contact with gluten. Though preventing cross-contact may feel daunting, it is an essential part of maintaining health and wellness for those with gluten-related disorders. You've got this!

Article adapted by GIG in 2020 from an original article written by Tina Ralutz, Bastyr University Dietetic Intern. (2018)

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.

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