

Healthy Gluten-Free Eating Guidelines

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Removing gluten from the diet is the essential first step to thriving gluten-free. Next, learn how to make your gluten-free plate exceptionally healthy.



Vegetables

Fill approximately half your plate with non-starchy vegetables such as broccoli, bell peppers, onions, cabbage, carrots, artichoke, beets, Brussels sprouts, tomato, cauliflower and cucumber. In addition to being naturally gluten-free, vegetables provide fiber, nutrients including folate, niacin, riboflavin, vitamin C, calcium, iron, phosphorus and potassium, and phytonutrients, which may provide other health benefits and protect against chronic disease. Antioxidants help counteract the damaging effects of oxidation, which is a normal end product of cellular function but which, in large amounts, can contribute to chronic disease and cancer.

Whole grains/starches

Fill approximately one quarter of your plate with grains and starchy vegetables (such as potatoes, sweet potatoes, and winter squash). Gluten-free grains include amaranth, quinoa, buckwheat, brown rice, teff, millet and corn. These grains provide many micronutrients (including magnesium, riboflavin, folate, zinc, thiamin and niacin) which are essential to general health, in addition to supporting immune and brain function. Eating at least half of your grains in their whole grain form means they contain not only more vitamins and minerals, but also more fiber and protein than their more refined counterparts, which will help keep you full longer and help prevent blood sugar spikes. When blood sugar plummets, you may feel irritable, dizzy, tired, weak and anxious, or as some people say, “hangry”. The complex carbohydrates and fiber found in whole grains can help keep blood sugar from going too low and causing these symptoms. Starchy vegetables also provide numerous micronutrients, and in their natural form are good sources of energy and fiber too.

Starchy vegetables provide nutrients like phosphorus, carotenoids (an antioxidant form of vitamin A), vitamins C and B6, niacin, thiamin, manganese, biotin, copper, potassium, vitamin K, folate, magnesium, pantothenic acid and riboflavin. Eating starchy vegetables in their natural form provides fiber and energy in the form of carbohydrates.

Protein sources

Fill approximately one quarter of your plate with protein sources. Protein can be found in foods from animal sources (beef, pork, poultry, fish, eggs and dairy) or plant sources (beans, legumes, nuts, seeds and soy). Animal protein provides a very absorbable form of iron, which is necessary for the formation of red blood cells and, as a result, for nutrient and oxygen distribution around the body. Animal proteins are also a good source of zinc (integral for immune function and many cellular reactions) and vitamin B6 (necessary for protein breakdown). Plant proteins provide thiamin, folate, fiber, iron, magnesium, copper, vitamins E and K, copper and potassium. These nutrients are necessary for cellular metabolism, DNA and cell replication, blood cell formation, bone health, natural antioxidant activity and blood clotting.

Healthy Fats

Favor mono- and polyunsaturated fats, which provide anti-inflammatory benefits and contribute to cardiovascular and brain health. They are found in nuts; seeds; salmon and other fatty fish such as mackerel, anchovies, sardines, black cod, rainbow trout and herring; olive oil, and avocados. Fish as a source of healthy fats also provide an excellent source of vitamin B12, which is integral for DNA and cell replication, as well as for normal brain and nervous system function. Aim for two servings of fish a week to obtain these benefits. Limit saturated fats by cutting back on intake of fatty meats, poultry with skin, and higher fat dairy products.

Fruits

A piece of fruit makes a great gluten-free snack or dessert, and is easily portable for on-the-go munching. Fruits provide high amounts of micronutrients, such as vitamin C (an antioxidant) and potassium (necessary for heart function as well as muscle contraction), fiber (good for your digestion and cardiovascular health), as well as other necessary micronutrients. Eat fruit with a protein source (such as peanut butter, a handful of nuts or a slice of cheese) to feel full longer and to prevent blood sugar spikes.

Water and other non-sugar-sweetened beverages

Drinking water throughout the day prevents dehydration and its associated symptoms (headache, dizziness, fatigue, and irritability) and allows for regular cellular and bodily functions such as metabolism and digestion. Limit consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages to avoid excess calories and blood sugar spikes.

Other considerations:

- Gluten-free diets can be high in fat and low in complex carbohydrates and fiber, iron, folate, niacin, thiamin and riboflavin. Additionally, some people with celiac disease may have poor absorption of, and higher needs for, calcium, folate, iron and vitamins A, B12, D, E and K. Various sources of these nutrients have been noted above. Consult with your personal healthcare team to assess your own unique nutrient and dietary needs.
- Consider adding at least 2 tablespoons of fermented foods each day to your meals, such as sauerkraut, kimchi, kefir, miso, kombucha, yogurt, and tempeh.* These types of foods may increase the microbial diversity in the gut, which in turn may reduce inflammation in the gut, support better nutrient absorption, and result in reduced risk of infection and illness.**

(*Be aware that some versions of these foods may contain gluten.

**These benefits may not be seen in everyone, and should not be counted on when ingesting these products.)

- Consider choosing organic produce when you can. A growing body of evidence shows that amounts of some nutrients and health-promoting antioxidants may be higher. And, while the types and amounts of pesticides used in growing food crops have been deemed safe by federal regulatory agencies, coming into contact with large amounts of pesticides can be harmful. Some recent research also indicates that higher pesticide intake in childhood may be associated with greater risk of developing celiac disease. We know that choosing organic foods is not always feasible, but if you are looking to avoid pesticides, check out this handy list: <https://www.ewg.org/foodnews/dirty-dozen.php>
- **Note:** Be aware of risk of gluten cross-contact! Buy only gluten-free certified oats and avoid buying anything (grains, nuts, seeds, legumes, beans, etc.) from bulk bins.

References:

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

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