



**CELIAC RESEARCH
PROGRAM**
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

**Selected Questions & Answers from
“How Good Nutrition Feeds Our Bodies and Minds”
November 19, 2020 with:**

Tara McCarthy, MS, RDN, LDN, of Boston Children’s Hospital
Pam Cureton, RDN, LDN, of Massachusetts General Hospital
Melinda Dennis, MS, RDN, LDN, of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center

Do the three registered dietitians have any favorite apps for label reading help that they recommend?

Tara: *I do not have any apps for label reading, but I use the Stop and Shop app to read labels on most of my food items.*

Pam: *I do not recommend apps, as they must err on the side of caution so often they will reject a product if there is an allergy advisory statement or an ingredient that they feel is questionable but safe. If the app tells you why the food is not safe, then you can use your judgment about whether the product is safe. Remember, there are just six words to look for when checking labels: wheat, rye, barley, malt, brewer’s yeast, and oats on products not labeled “gluten-free.”*

Melinda: *Many of my patients like FindMeGlutenFree. I don’t recommend apps, per se. I prefer to teach how to carefully read a label so that the individual can rely on her/himself to understand what is safe. I also recommend contacting companies directly when there is a question.*

Why are most gluten-free packaged products not fortified?

For this answer, we suggest reading this excerpt from celiac dietitian Tricia Thompson of Gluten Free Watchdog.

<https://www.glutenfreewatchdog.org/news/gluten-free-grain-foods-and-the-lack-of-b-vitamin-enrichment/>

Is it true that as a result of COVID-19, the FDA has relaxed standards, particularly in regard to the extent of gluten in a so-called gluten-free food?

In June 2020, the FDA responded to Gluten Free Watchdog and six other celiac organizations concerned about the temporary policy on food labeling changes during the pandemic. Per the FDA, “FDA’s temporary policy does not provide labeling flexibilities to industry if a health or safety issue would result, including the substitution of an ingredient containing gluten for a gluten-free ingredient.”

For more info on FDA standards, see below:

Questions and Answers on the FDA’s Temporary Policy on Food Labeling Changes During the COVID-19 Pandemic:

<https://www.fda.gov/food/food-safety-during-emergencies/questions-and-answers-fdas-temporary-policy-food-labeling-changes-during-covid-19-pandemic>

Gluten Free Watchdog: June 22, 2020

<https://www.glutenfreewatchdog.org/news/fda-responds-to-our-concerns-about-their-temporary-policy-on-food-labeling-changes/>

Gluten Free Watchdog: June 23, 2020

<https://www.glutenfreewatchdog.org/news/for-food-manufacturers-some-helpful-information-about-ingredients-containing-gluten/>

Are teff and millet at risk for cross-contamination because of rotating growth in the field (similar to oats)?

Yes. Crop rotation in the field with gluten-containing grains is also possible for millet and teff. It is very important to select grains, starches and flours that are labeled “gluten-free” because of the risk of cross contact with gluten-containing grains during harvest, transport, milling and production. Avoid shopping from bulk bins which can increase the risk of cross-contact.

What is the best way to approach eating in a restaurant that is not a dedicated gluten-free facility?

Tara: *It is important to call ahead, speak with the manager and ask all your questions beforehand about cross contact. You can also use the FindMeGlutenFree app to help with choosing restaurants.*

Pam: *I also recommend telling the staff that you have a wheat allergy because: 1) Everyone has heard of gluten, but many people do not know what it is (I've heard: Is it Soy? Sugar? Milk? NO!) and 2) Some people follow a gluten-free diet for all the wrong reasons, so sometimes it is not taken seriously.*

Often the wait staff will ask, "Is this an allergy or a personal choice?" This tells me that they understand that an allergy is a medical condition and should be taken seriously. And yes, celiac disease is NOT an allergy, but an autoimmune disease. Of course, we are also concerned about eliminating any items containing barley and rye, but this can be covered when asking about ingredients in a particular menu item.

Melinda: *I identify myself as having celiac disease and state that I need a gluten-free meal and that I need to avoid cross contamination (or cross contact). Asking the staff/server "What dishes do YOU recommend for someone on a gluten-free diet?" will help you to determine if the server is knowledgeable and if the restaurant is a reasonable choice.*

Gluten-free restaurant cards listing safe/unsafe foods and ingredients can be a useful tool. I ask to speak to the chef or manager if I have questions that the server/staff cannot address. I tip and thank them graciously if it's a good experience and promise to spread the word.

These types of questions and more can be discussed in greater depth during a nutrition consult with a registered dietitian skilled in the gluten-free diet.

Thank you to Tara, Pam and Melinda for also addressing questions during the presentation of this great discussion, which you can view here:

<https://nationalceliac.org/wp-content/uploads/1607/19/2020.11.19-All-Things-Celiac-Video.mp4>

And thank you to all who submitted questions and participated in the webinar.