

# Living with a Gluten-Free Diet

Writing about a gluten-free diet could be a book in itself. Since it is not possible to cover all aspects of a gluten-free diet in a single chapter, the focus will be on important facts and practical tips that will assist individuals in following a gluten-free diet. A selection of gluten-free recipes is presented in a separate chapter.

Following a gluten-free diet for life often involves both changes in eating habits and lifestyle, but the improvements in health are so great that once the diet is understood and followed carefully, the lifestyle changes will be worth all the effort.

## Basic Facts

Patients with celiac disease have to consume a strict gluten-free diet for the rest of their life. This means that their diet should not contain any of the following;

- **Wheat**
- **Barley**
- **Rye**
- **Triticale** (a cross between wheat and rye)

Any food or beverage made from or which contain any of the above cereals must also be avoided.

## ○ KEY POINT

Avoid eating *roti, naan, kulcha, paratha and poori* as they are all made from wheat.

There are however many foods that are naturally gluten-free and are safe for individuals with celiac disease, as long as no wheat, rye or barley have been added to them. Naturally gluten-free foods include:

- ✓ **Rice**
- ✓ **Corn (maize)**
- ✓ **Millet**
- ✓ **All lentils and pulses (*daal*)**
- ✓ **All fruits**
- ✓ **All vegetables**
- ✓ **All nuts**
- ✓ **Milk and dairy products**
- ✓ **All types of fresh meats**
- ✓ **Eggs**
- ✓ **Salt, pepper, turmeric and other natural spices**
- ✓ **Water, all type of teas, coffee and most other beverages**

There are many other dietary items that are gluten-free and will be listed later.

As will be seen later in this chapter, the gluten-free diet can be difficult and complicated to follow, at least in the beginning. A consultation with a registered dietitian is essential to understand all the details.

## What Does Gluten-Free Mean?

Research has shown that in food a gluten content of less than 20 parts per million (ppm, or 20 mg/kg) is safe for most

individuals with celiac disease. This is a very tiny amount. The safety will also depend on the total amount of food eaten per day. Studies show that as little as 50 mg of gluten if taken daily for a few months can cause intestinal damage. An average slice of bread contains about 3.5 gm of gluten which amounts to about 70 times this 50 mg threshold for intestinal damage. In other words, an amount as little as 1/70<sup>th</sup> of a slice of bread may lead to problems.

## **Current International Definition**

The Codex Alimentarius Commission is an international body that was established in 1963 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO UN) and the World Health Organization (WHO) and is responsible for setting standards for regulating foods. In July 2008 the Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses, revised its standard for foods to be considered “gluten-free” for international trade (Codex Stan 118-1979). The highlights of this latest Standard include the following:

- ❖ Gluten-free foods do not contain wheat, rye, barley, oats or their crossbred varieties and the gluten level does not exceed 20 ppm (parts per million i.e. 20 mg/kg) in total, based on the food as sold or distributed to the consumer.

and/or

- ❖ Gluten-free foods may contain one or more ingredients from wheat, rye, barley, oats or their crossbred varieties which have been specially processed to remove gluten and the gluten level does not exceed 20 mg/kg (20 ppm) in total, based on the food as sold or distributed to the consumer.

- ❖ The allowance of pure, uncontaminated oats may be determined at the national level.
- ❖ Foods specially processed to reduce gluten content to a level between 20 ppm-100 ppm (20 and 100 mg/kg) based on the food as sold or distributed to the consumer **must not** be labeled gluten-free. Labeling terms for such products (e.g. low gluten, reduced gluten) and decisions for marketing may be determined at the national level, but must indicate the true nature of the food.
- ❖ Naturally gluten-free foods shall not be designated “special dietary”, “special dietetic” or any other equivalent term, but may bear a statement on the label that “this food is by its nature gluten-free”.

The details of the above standard may be difficult to understand by ordinary consumers. These are, however, very important for food manufacturers and government agencies regulating food safety. If a product is labeled “gluten-free”, it must meet the above standard of less than 20 ppm of gluten. It is the manufacturer’s responsibility to ensure that the gluten content does not exceed the allowed limit. This standardized definition of gluten-free is being applied in the USA and Europe and will help create uniformity for international trade. An international reference point will also help in resolving disputes concerning food safety and will protect consumers.

## **Cereals & Flours to Avoid on a Gluten-Free Diet**

The cereals and flours that should be avoided on a gluten-free diet are listed in Table 2. The food items that are allowed in a gluten-free diet are listed in Table 3.

**TABLE 2**  
**CEREAL AND FLOURS TO AVOID**  
 (Items that contains gluten)

**Wheat**

**Barley**

**Rye**

**Triticale**

**Oats\*** (*dalya*)

**Other types of wheat and its products including:**

<i>Atta</i>	Bulgar
<i>Maida</i> **	Couscous
Cracked wheat	Dinkle
Wheat bran	Einkorn or Eikhorn
Wheat germ	Emmer
Wheat starch	Farina
High gluten/protein flour	Farro (Italian wheat)
Bromated flour	Kamut
Durum flour	Hydrolyzed wheat protein
Enriched/White flour	Seitan
Graham flour	Semolina ( <i>sooji</i> ***)
Phosphated flour	Spelt

\* Pure and uncontaminated oats in limited quantities are safe for consumption by most people with celiac disease. However, pure oats are not available in our country at this time. Therefore, oats should be avoided as they are likely contaminated with gluten-containing grains. This is the main reason for including oats in the list of grains to be avoided.

\*\**Maida* is finely-milled wheat which is used to make breads like *paratha* and *naan*. It is extracted from the inner white portion of the wheat after the outer brownish layer is removed.

\*\*\**Sooji* is semolina, which is the coarse, purified wheat middling of durum wheat. Semolina is scorched with sugar, milk, butter, and nuts to make sweets (*sooji halva*). Both *maida* and *sooji* are products of wheat and are NOT allowed in a gluten-free diet.

**TABLE 3**  
**CEREALS, FLOURS & SEEDS ALLOWED**  
**IN A GUTEN-FREE DIET**

**Agar**

**Amaranth**

**Besan** or gram flour (made from *chana dal*)

**Buckwheat**

**Carrageenan**

**Cassava/Manioc/Tapioca**

**Chestnut** (flour)

**Corn** or **Maize** (*makai*)

**Flax/Linseed**

**Guar gum**

**Hemp** (flour and seeds)

**Legume flours**

**Millet** (*bajra*)

**Mustard** (flour, powder, seeds and oil)

**Nut flours** (almond, pecan, etc.)

**Polenta** (made from boiled cornmeal)

**Psyllium husk** (*ispaghol*)

**Pulses** (beans, lentils)

**Quinoa**

**Rice** (all types, e.g. wild, aromatic, basmati)

**Sago**

**Sesame** (oil and seeds)

**Sorghum**

**Soyabean**

**Tapioca**

**Teff**

**Urd/Urad** (flour made from lentils)

**Yeast** (baking)

NOTE: The list of gluten-free food items is long and only the commonly used ones are mentioned.

# Investigation of Ingredients

Everyone on a gluten-free diet knows which grains to avoid i.e. wheat, barley and rye. However, when it comes to buying ingredients for cooking or purchasing packaged foods, things can get complicated.

Wheat is a frequently used filler or thickener in many foods such as soups and sauces, and processed food products may contain hidden sources of gluten. Sometimes naturally gluten-free foods have added gluten, such as breaded meat, or battered fish. If all the ingredients are not clearly listed on the package, there is a chance that the product may contain gluten and therefore it should be avoided. On the other hand, many products presumed to contain gluten may actually be gluten-free. Knowledge of such products can increase ones choice of foods.

The following is a list of ingredients that are doubtful as to their gluten-free status, mostly safe to consume or to be used with caution.

## **DOUBTFUL**

### **Modified food starch**

Modified cornstarch, modified potato starch and modified tapioca starch are all safe to use. Wheat starch should be avoided. If the plant source is not identified, it is best to avoid the food.

### **Hydrolyzed vegetable/plant protein**

Hydrolyzed vegetable protein can be derived from different plant sources. In some countries, the manufacturer is required to list if the hydrolyzed plant protein is made from wheat but

not if made from barley or rye. If it is derived from wheat it is obviously not safe. However, if it is derived from corn or soy protein it is gluten-free. If the source of the plant is stated, for example, "hydrolyzed corn protein", then it is safe to use. If the source is not listed, it is best to avoid it.

### **Seasonings**

These are blends of herbs and spices. Wheat flour or wheat starch is sometimes used as a carrier in seasonings. One needs to read the label carefully.

## **MOSTLY SAFE**

### **Dextrose**

Dextrose is a highly refined sugar and is safe.

### **Flavorings**

Neither natural nor artificial flavorings contain gluten, except for barley malt, which must be avoided

### **Glucose Syrup**

This is a highly purified sugar syrup and is safe.

### **Maltodextrin**

Maltodextrin is used as a bulking agent in several food products like margarine and jams. It is commonly derived from corn, rice or potato starch and is safe.

### **Spice and Herb mixtures**

As mentioned previously, individual spices like pepper and turmeric are gluten-free. Herbs like mint and oregano are also safe. In the majority of cases, the spice mixes of these herbs and spices do not contain any flour or starch. Curry powder may have gram flour in it which is safe, but some curry pastes

may have wheat added and should be avoided. Most spices are felt to be safe and should be used as desired to enhance flavoring of the food.

## **WATCH OUT**

### **Breakfast Cereals**

Most breakfast cereals are made from wheat and clearly are not safe to eat. Cereals made from corn or rice should be safe but, unfortunately, most contain malt which is derived from barley. For example, cornflakes and rice cereals contain malt flavoring and thus are not gluten-free.

### **Canned Soups and Stews**

One should look out for starch fillers, soy sauce and hydrolyzed vegetable protein in these products to assess their safety.

### **Soy Sauce**

Soy sauce usually contains wheat or roasted barley. However, there are some imported brands that are gluten-free. Unless the ingredients are mentioned clearly, soy sauce should not be used.

### **Vinegar**

All vinegars are gluten-free, except for malt vinegar which is made from barley and is not gluten-free.

### **Yogurt, Cheese and Ice Creams**

Sometimes starch fillers are added to these products. The source of the starch should be checked.

## **O KEY POINT**

Try to prepare your food from fresh ingredients rather than relying on packaged products.

# **Gluten in Non-Food Products**

Gluten may be present in certain non-food products. The following are some examples.

## **Medications**

Some medications may contain gluten as an ingredient. This applies to prescription drugs and over-the-counter medications including vitamins and minerals. It is best to read the label on the bottle or the drug package insert for a complete list of ingredients. If the ingredients are not listed there is no guarantee that gluten will not be present. It is best to avoid the product if possible. Ask the pharmacist, who may be able to determine the safety of the medication. If the pharmacist cannot help, the drug manufacturer should be contacted directly to get the information.

## **Herbal Products**

There are several oral herbal products and supplements on the market that may contain gluten. If the ingredients are not listed it is difficult to confirm their gluten-free status.

## **Cosmetics**

All shampoos, perfumes, eye liners (*surma*), creams, lotions and ointments are safe to use. Gluten is harmful only when it is ingested. Lipstick containing wheat starch should be avoided.

## **Toothpaste**

Most toothpastes do not contain gluten. Also, the mouth is rinsed in brushing and toothpaste not usually swallowed so it should be generally safe. Young children require supervision.

## **Envelopes and Stamps**

Avoid licking envelopes and postage stamps as the adhesive may contain gluten. This is no longer an issue in most other countries but one cannot be sure of this in Pakistan.

### **O KEY POINT**

Gluten is toxic only when ingested, not when applied to the skin.

## **Understanding Cross Contamination**

Ideally speaking, a gluten-free diet should contain zero gluten. However, the reality is that there is sometimes background contamination with gluten-containing grains in processing of most food products. This contamination can occur at harvesting, storage, transportation or manufacturing of the final product.

Cross contamination of foods with gluten remains one the biggest challenges for those on a gluten-free diet. Even with utmost care, this always remains a possibility. For those patients with celiac disease who continue to have symptoms despite being on a strict gluten-free diet, hidden gluten in foods is often the most common cause.

Wheat is one of the most common ingredients of our diet. In a manufacturing plant where wheat flour is produced, contamination of other food products with wheat is very likely. For example, if corn flour is ground in the same milling machine that makes wheat flour (*atta*), it will be contaminated with wheat and will not be safe on a gluten-free diet. Often the

manufacturer is unaware of the issue of cross contamination. As mentioned earlier in the Definition of the gluten-free diet, even a small amount of gluten in the diet can lead to serious health problems.

The tips mentioned in this chapter may help but one must always remain vigilant. One should be prepared that accidents with gluten will happen. In real life this is inevitable. What is important is to take the best possible precautions and never take gluten intentionally.

### **○ KEY POINT**

The aim of a gluten-free diet should be ZERO tolerance to gluten i.e. absolutely no gluten.

## **Keeping the Kitchen Gluten-Free**

Cross contamination can occur during the manufacture of the gluten-free product but it can also occur at in the kitchen of the patient. Families with a member with newly diagnosed celiac disease can often overlook this issue. To avoid cross contamination, the following basic principles should be kept in mind.

- ❖ Wash all cooking utensils and counter tops thoroughly before preparing a gluten-free dish.
- ❖ Do not use the same serving utensil (spoon, knife, fork, ladle, etc.) for regular and gluten-free foods.
- ❖ It is best to have a separate toaster for gluten-free bread. The crumbs of wheat bread can cause contamination.

- ❖ If oil is used to deep fry foods that contain gluten, do not use the same oil for cooking gluten-free foods. Discard that oil or if stored, mark the container clearly.
- ❖ Store gluten-free foods separately in clearly marked containers. If possible, designate one cupboard in the kitchen as “Gluten-Free”.

## Label Reading

For those on a gluten-free diet, careful reading of labels on food products is essential. However, when counseling patients about the importance of label reading, one assumes that all individuals are able to read and that the ingredients will be listed clearly and honestly on packages. Unfortunately, in our country both these assumptions are wrong. With a high illiteracy rate, many people cannot read. Furthermore, most labels are in English, further limiting the ability to read the listing. Many packaged products either do not have an ingredient list or the list is incomplete. Also, accuracy of listing can never be guaranteed.

Label reading is an important concept that needs to be learned. Initially, this can be frustrating but with patience and practice it becomes easier. Some ingredient listings may seem complicated but as knowledge of the gluten-free diet increases, they become easier to understand and interpret. Reading labels should facilitate your buying rather than restricting it.

### **O KEY POINT**

The most important thing to remember when preparing or buying gluten-free products is to ensure that there is no contamination with gluten-containing grains.

# Challenges of Label Reading

Reading labels can sometimes be challenging. Even after learning about many of the ingredients, there could still be items which remain unfamiliar. Furthermore, the ingredients can sometimes sound alike or can have more than one source causing confusion and the possibility of error. The following examples will help illustrate these points.

## (1). Unfamiliar Ingredients

Guanylate is an ingredient many may not have heard about. It may be listed as an ingredient on a packaged food product. Guanylate is produced from dried fish or dried seaweed and is often added to instant noodles, soups, potato chips and other snacks. It is gluten-free.

## (2). Similar Sounding Ingredients

The names gram flour and Graham flour sound similar but they are completely different products. Gram flour is made from a legume called *chana dal*. It is also called *besan* and is gluten-free. Graham flour, on the other hand, is a variety of whole wheat flour and contains gluten.

## (3). Variable Sources

An ingredient may be a derivative of a gluten-containing grain. For example, malt is most commonly made from barley, and barley is not allowed in a gluten-free diet. This is sometimes listed as “barley malt” which makes it easy to avoid. However, malt can also be made from rice which should be safe. Unless the label clearly says “rice malt”, it is best to avoid it as it is likely made from barley.

## **○ KEY POINT**

If you are not sure whether a product is gluten-free or not, it is best to avoid it. When in DOUBT, leave it OUT.

## **Practical Tips**

The following suggestions may be helpful for effective label reading.

- ❖ If the product has a label, read it. This should be done even for seemingly trivial items like candies. Make label reading a habit.
- ❖ Make sure that you understand each and every ingredient. If an ingredient is unfamiliar, it is best to avoid the product until you can determine if the food is gluten-free.
- ❖ Read the label every time while buying a product even if you have checked the ingredients previously. Manufacturers can change the ingredients of familiar products without warning
- ❖ Keep a written list of safe and unsafe ingredients in your wallet or purse. You can copy the list presented earlier in this chapter.

## **○ KEY POINT**

Rice, corn flour and gram flour are the best alternates to wheat in our everyday eating.

## **Cost of the Gluten-Free Diet**

Wheat is one of the most abundant and cheapest grain available around the world. With its exclusion in a gluten-free diet, one has to rely on more costly grains like rice. Studies from United States and Canada show that a gluten-free diet can be two to three times more expensive than the regular diet. The financial burden can be even heavier if more than one family member is affected by celiac disease.

The following tips may help reduce the cost of gluten-free diet:

- ❖ Prepare food from fresh ingredients. Packaged gluten-free foods are always more expensive.
- ❖ If you have a freezer, food can be cooked in bulk and kept frozen in portions. This will help save time and energy.
- ❖ Stock up on dry gluten-free foods when they are available at a good price.

## **Nutritional Issues in Gluten-Free Diet**

The gluten-free diet is not only restrictive but there have been concerns about its nutritional adequacy as well. Fortification of gluten-free flours with minerals and trace elements may not be mandated as is the case with regular flours. This is less likely to be a problem in our country where pre-mixed gluten-free flours are scarcely available.

Other concerns about fiber, calcium and excessive weight gain are discussed below.

## Fiber

Dietary fiber can be divided into two main types: soluble and insoluble. Some soluble fibers form a viscous gel while others dissolve completely in water. Insoluble fibers do not form gels and move through the intestinal tract intact. Many fibers are a mixture of both types. By not being fully absorbed, fiber remains in the bowel and pulls water thus making the stools soft. For fiber to have its beneficial effect, adequate intake of water is essential. It is recommended that adults consume 20-35 grams of fiber a day, including both soluble and insoluble fiber. A diet rich in fiber has other benefits as well including heart health.

Since a significant amount of fiber (roughage) in our diet comes from wheat products, a gluten-free diet can be lower in fiber. This can cause constipation.

Fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds are excellent sources of fiber. Lentils (*daal*) are also a good source of soluble fiber. They are also rich in other nutrients including proteins and are often referred to as poor man's meat! Although they have become more expensive over the years, they are still much cheaper than meats and should increasingly be part of the diet.

If dietary measure does not help, patients with constipation can try any of the commercially available laxatives (stool softeners). It is important to check that there is no gluten listed in the ingredients. Psyllium husk also called *ispaghul* or *ispaghula* is a carbohydrate gum derived from the seed of a plant *Plantago ovate*. Ispaghul is one of the highest naturally occurring sources of soluble fiber (approximately 75%). Pure ispaghol is gluten-free.

## Calcium and Vitamin D

A balanced diet should contain adequate amounts of calcium and vitamin D. These are essential nutrients for many body

functions, most importantly bone health. Dairy products are the best source of calcium. Packaged milk is also fortified with vitamin D. For people with lactose intolerance who cannot drink milk, calcium intake may not be adequate. Other calcium rich foods should be consumed or an oral supplement taken. Limiting the intake of salt and caffeine can reduce loss of calcium from the bones. Physical exercise and stopping smoking are also important factors for bone health.

Recent research has shown that the benefits of vitamin D go far beyond its effects on the bones. It is likely that most people do not get enough vitamin D in their diet. A daily oral supplement of vitamin D is recommended.

## **Excessive Weight Gain**

A gluten-free diet that consists of commercial gluten-free baked goods can be higher in calories and excessive weight gain can become an issue in some patients. Such products often contain extra fat and sugar to improve the texture and shelf life of these products.

If you were underweight at diagnosis, your weight should improve with the gluten-free diet and then stabilize. Your weight should be checked regularly. Reducing the consumption of high calorie foods and regular exercise will help prevent obesity.

## **Children and the Gluten-Free Diet**

The gluten-free diet poses special challenges for children. Those children who are diagnosed in infancy grow up in a gluten-free lifestyle and tend to be easier to manage. Older children can have a difficult time adjusting. Parents need to be patient and supportive.

This section will provide some guidelines for parents to help keep their children gluten-free. The suggestions are mostly for younger and school aged children. Parents will have less control of the diet of adolescents. The peers of the adolescent should be educated about the gluten-free diet to enable them to provide the appropriate support to the patient.

## **Learning About the Gluten-Free Diet**

As a parent, the first thing you need to do is to learn about the gluten-free diet yourself. Only then can you effectively teach your child and bring about a positive change.

### **O KEY POINT**

The best patient is a well-informed patient.

## **Empowering the Child**

Children are great learners. They have an amazing capacity to absorb information. Children should be involved in the process of buying foods from a young age and encouraged to make choices. Take the children shopping and let them explore the shelves in the store.

Teach your child to say no to gluten-containing foods offered by friends or family. Many children get symptoms like vomiting, diarrhea or abdominal pain after ingesting gluten. They develop an aversion to gluten-containing foods and usually remain very compliant. Other children do not get any significant symptoms and may start to transgress in their gluten-free diet.

## **Educating the Teachers**

Providing the child's teachers with information on celiac disease and the gluten-free diet is essential. Children often share foods at school. The teacher must be told that gluten is

dangerous for the child and no exceptions are to be made. They should understand that the child may get symptoms if they are exposed accidentally (or intentionally) to gluten. A written list of allowed and not-allowed ingredients should be provided. A copy should be kept in the child's school bag. Once the teacher is well-informed, he/she can help the child cope better with the diet.

## **Lunches**

Finding what to send for lunch can be a difficult task. The lunch that the child takes to school should be prepared at home. The use of school cafeterias or snacks from street vendors is strongly discouraged as food items sold there would most likely be contaminated with gluten. Our country is blessed with a variety of fruits in all seasons. Encourage the child to eat fruits. The recipes provided in this book can help make gluten-free pita (*roti*), sandwiches, etc.

## **Involving Friends and Relatives**

Friends and family should also be educated about the diet. Parents of the child's friends should also be encouraged to understand. This also helps spread awareness. Seek out another family with a child who has celiac disease. If you look for one, you will be amazed how quickly you may find one. Share recipes with each other. Keeping a small supply of gluten-free foods in the home of friends and family that you visit frequently can come in very handy.

## **Socializing**

This is one area where parents often face difficulty. Social activities like birthday parties can become limited as the child cannot safely attend these with dietary restrictions. Even worse, the child may be offered a piece of regular gluten-containing cake at a birthday party. A little preparation can help. Do not

hesitate to tell the host about the child's dietary needs. Making a small cake and sending it with the child or to the host's place in advance is one strategy parents have found useful.

When dining away from home, take the child to a restaurant where you know gluten-free dishes will be available, and help the child in menu selection

### **Sweets (*mitthai*)**

When discussing the issues in gluten-free in children, one has to mention sweets (*mitthai*). Most children love sweets. Many sweets are made of *maida* (wheat) and should not be consumed. Commercially available sweets made from gluten-free ingredients (e.g. *laddoo*, *maysoo*, etc.) are most likely contaminated at the manufacturing site. It is best to avoid them. The safest strategy is to learn to make these gluten-free sweets at home.

### **Minimizing the Stigma**

The word “disease” can carry a stigma. Try to minimize this by treating the child as a normal person and integrating him/her in the family and with other children. There are gluten-free treats like popcorn and ice cream that the whole family can enjoy. Once on a gluten-free diet, the children feel very well and it is hard to even recognize that they have a chronic illness. Many parents prefer to use the label “gluten (*atta*) allergy” rather than “celiac disease”. While making the child feel as normal as possible, also ensure that he/she knows that his/her dietary needs are different. This is a balance that parents need to keep in mind.

#### **○ KEY POINT**

Remember, your child has a condition which is fully treatable.

# Eating Out Gluten-Free

Eating out can be challenging for individuals on a gluten-free diet. This includes eating with friends and family, restaurants and travelling. A little planning can help ease the difficulty.

## Restaurants

Many countries have restaurants that cater to the needs of those on a gluten-free diet. In our country, there is no such awareness in society and it is unlikely that restaurant personnel will even know what a gluten-free diet means.

The following tips may be used when eating out in restaurants.

- ❖ Avoid fast food restaurants. These are places that serve foods like burgers, pizza, nuggets, French fries and deep-fried chicken. Gluten is unavoidable in these restaurants. Most of these are not healthy foods in any case.
- ❖ Carry a small card that lists food items in English and Urdu which you cannot eat. (This is essentially things with wheat, barley and rye and any ingredients made from these grains). It is also helpful to list what can be safely eaten. Keep in mind that not everyone in our country is literate. Be prepared to give oral instructions.
- ❖ Locate a restaurant(s) in your town that does have some items on the menu which are naturally gluten-free. Select a few dishes of interest from the menu. Avoid dishes that use thickeners, gravy or batter.
- ❖ Meet with the manager and cook/chef of the restaurant and discuss your dietary needs. Educate them about the issues involved with the gluten-free diet, cross

contamination and how to avoid it. There is no substitute for having a personal face-to-face meeting. Make friends with the staff.

- ❖ Do not presume that the restaurant staff will understand what you tell them at the first meeting. Grasping even the basics of a gluten-free diet can be difficult for members of the general public. Keep your instructions simple. It may be helpful to leave a written list of gluten-containing ingredients in English and Urdu.
- ❖ When the dish is served, make sure it is the right dish and your order has not been mixed up.
- ❖ Eat a couple of times at the selected restaurant(s) and see how you feel. If you do not get any symptoms, that is reassuring. Remember that having no symptoms after eating does not mean that there was absolutely no cross contamination.
- ❖ Avoid going to the restaurant at busy times of the day. Cross contamination is more likely to happen during those periods.
- ❖ Say a special thank you to the restaurant staff. Inform them that you will be back again and will be passing the word around about the quality of their establishment.
- ❖ Use the same precautions each time you visit the restaurant. The staff preparing the dishes or the ingredients used in the dishes may have changed.
- ❖ Once you have eaten at the restaurant(s) and found it appropriate, share the information with others on a gluten-free diet. A list of restaurant can be assembled which will help widen the choices of gluten-free dishes.

There are many different kinds of restaurants. The above tips will apply mostly to well-established restaurants which are likely to be expensive. For cheaper establishments, one has to use discretion. Staying with plain rice and lentils (*daal*) may be the safest option.

## Traveling

Travelling can pose challenges for those on a gluten-free diet. In our country, long distance travelling for sightseeing purposes is less common. Most travelling is to meet relatives and friends, attend weddings, etc. There is some business travel. Travelling short distance poses fewer problems as one gets to the destination quickly. Long distance travel can be more difficult. The following suggestions may be helpful.

- ❖ Leave home with the assumption that gluten-free foods will not be available while you are travelling.
- ❖ Have a meal before you leave home. This will at least keep your appetite under check for some time
- ❖ It is best to carry your own gluten-free foods with you such as dry, non-perishable gluten-free snacks. Nuts like plain or roasted peanuts and almonds are also easily available and can come in very handy especially while waiting at a bus terminal or an airport. Fresh fruit is a good choice. It is readily available on the highways and at train stations and there is no fear of cross contamination.
- ❖ Some international airlines offer a gluten-free meal on their menu. Advance request is required. But it is wise to take some gluten-free foods along, in case of difficulties or delays.

## Weddings Parties

Wedding parties (*shaadi*) are an integral part of our culture. Cuisine takes a central stage in any wedding ceremony. In a wedding dinner, there is little chance of affecting a change as the food is commonly prepared off-site. Fortunately, the menus at weddings almost always contain rice and lamb or chicken curry. These should be gluten-free.

When attending wedding dinners the following points should be kept in mind.

- ❖ Avoid salads that contain dressings.
- ❖ Avoid deep fried products (e.g. fish) as the batter is made from wheat (*maida*).
- ❖ Desserts made from bread (e.g. *shahi tookray*) are obviously not safe. Other desserts like *kheer* or *firni* (rice puddings) and *gajrayla* (carrot and milk pudding) are safe as long as rice flour is used.

### ○ KEY POINT

Careful advance preparation can make things easier when eating out or travelling.

## Information for Travelers to Pakistan

Wheat is the major staple in Pakistan. Rice is also widely available but more expensive. Availability of certified gluten-free foods in Pakistan is limited. Labeling on products is in English. Food items sold in open containers or in bulk cannot be guaranteed to be gluten-free.

The Urdu language is widely spoken throughout the country. In many hotels and restaurants, English is also understood to a limited degree. While eating at a restaurant, the

waiter or manager should be consulted regarding the possible gluten content of the dishes.

Interestingly, there is no direct translation for the words Celiac or Gluten in the Urdu language. Communicating about celiac disease and the gluten-free diet in Urdu can, therefore, be difficult. To say “I have celiac disease” in Urdu, one would say “*Mujhai marz celiac hai*”. It is quite unlikely that the other person would have ever heard about celiac disease. Having somebody who could translate English is helpful.

## **Coping with the Gluten-Free Diet**

In closing, a strict gluten-free diet can be challenging, especially at the beginning. High cost, lack of availability of gluten-free products, limitations in eating out and worries about cross contamination can all be overwhelming. It is common for patients to go through denial, anger and frustration after the diagnosis of a chronic illness.

Despite these challenges, the vast majority of patients with celiac disease enjoy a full, healthy and a vigorous life. Keeping a positive and a realistic attitude goes a long way in maintaining a gluten-free life style, and having a healthy, happy life – gluten-free.

### **THE FINAL WORD**

**Take control of your gluten-free diet.  
Do not let the gluten-free diet control you.**