

# ask the celiac expert

with Shelley Case, RD



**Q** How closely do I need to follow the gluten-free diet? Will a little bit of gluten harm me?

**A** The only treatment for celiac disease is a strict gluten-free diet for life. Eliminating gluten will allow the villi in the small intestine to heal, resulting in improved absorption of nutrients. Over time, symptoms will resolve and you will begin to feel better. Damage to the small intestine can still occur if you eat gluten on a regular basis, even if you don't feel symptoms. The risk of long-term complications, including cancer of the gastrointestinal tract, is greatly reduced if the diet is followed closely.

But the question is: how strict do you need to be?

Response to gluten is highly variable among individuals with celiac disease so it is difficult to establish a safe threshold level. In a 2007 study, 49 adults with celiac disease following a strict gluten-free diet were challenged with 10 or 50 mg of gluten for three months. Those who were exposed to 50 mg of gluten a day had small but significant mucosal damage to the villi of the small intestine. One patient who was challenged with 10 mg of gluten a day developed symptoms. To put this in perspective, one slice of bread with wheat flour contains over 2,500 mg of gluten.

To help you limit your exposure to gluten:

- Read food labels every time you shop. Manufacturers sometimes change product formulations and what had been gluten-

free previously may now include gluten-containing ingredients.

- Buy grains, flours and starches that are labeled "gluten-free" from companies that test their products for gluten.
- Be diligent in preventing cross-contamination when eating at home. Read my tips for keeping your kitchen gluten-safe at [Allergicliving.com/gfkitchen](http://Allergicliving.com/gfkitchen).
- Be especially careful when eating out. Choose restaurants that have a gluten-free menu or are knowledgeable and willing to accommodate those with special dietary restrictions.
- Consult a registered dietitian with expertise in celiac disease who can review your diet and provide comprehensive and practical information about how to follow a strict gluten-free diet.

*Shelley Case, RD, is an international celiac nutrition expert, consulting dietitian and author of Gluten-Free Diet: A Comprehensive Resource Guide. See [www.glutenfreediet.ca](http://www.glutenfreediet.ca). Shelley Case is on the advisory boards of the Canadian Celiac Association, the Celiac Disease Foundation and the Gluten-Free Intolerance Group. Send your question to: [editor@allergicliving.com](mailto:editor@allergicliving.com)*

## THE DEFINITIVE GLUTEN-FREE GUIDE

**Here's what you'll find in the new *Gluten Free Diet*:**

- Detailed food and ingredient information
- Creative ideas for meals and snacks
- Gluten-free cooking and recipes with nutritional analysis
- Prevention of cross-contamination
- Nutrition information and practical strategies for healthy gluten-free living
- Tips for eating out
- Latest breaking news about oats, including position statements from organizations around the world ... and references
- New food and GF labeling regulations in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia/NZ, as well as the international Codex Alimentarius
- Over 3100 gluten-free specialty products listed by company name, product name and package size
- Directory of more than 270 American, Canadian and international companies divided into 3 categories: manufacturers of GF products, GF bakeries and GF stores & distributors
- Resources- books, cookbooks, magazines, celiac groups around the world and more!



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