



Latest regulations make gluten-free eating easier

Anyone who has gluten intolerance or has the autoimmune celiac condition knows how hard it is to find foods free of the offending wheat protein. In the short time since our June 25 article on gluten-related health conditions, there has been an important new development. Just this month, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration released new regulations for gluten-free labeling of foods. These regulations, along with manufacturer interest in meeting growing consumer demand for gluten-free foods, should be a great help for those who need to avoid gluten for health reasons.

QUESTION: What is gluten?

ANSWER: Gluten is a protein in wheat and closely related grains like barley that causes a range of adverse reactions in some people. This means that most bread products (including whole-grain breads, cakes, crackers, tortillas, pancakes, scones, etc.) must be avoided by those who are gluten-sensitive. Gluten-containing ingredients may be hidden as a minor component of sauces, dressings, seasonings, or used as a thickener in fat-free dairy products, just to name a few.

Q: What foods are naturally free of gluten?

A: Fresh and unprocessed fruits,

vegetables and meats are gluten-free. When these products are processed, wheat or other gluten-containing ingredients sometimes are used, causing trace amounts of the problem protein to enter the food chain. Grains such as rice, corn and oats do not naturally contain gluten. But some products made from these grains can contain small amounts of gluten due to the use of wheat in other products made in the same production facility.

Q: Is it possible for a gluten-intolerant person to enjoy food without the worry of hidden gluten?

A: The new federal labeling law will help greatly. There is a need for food products to be certified gluten-free, and the new labeling regulations will help fulfill the growing demand for these foods. These regulations specify what types of foods can legally make the “gluten-free” claim on labels. This includes foods that naturally or due to processing contain less than 20 parts per million of gluten, equal to about 20 grains of salt in a kilogram (2.2 pounds) of food. Because regulations allow foods naturally free of gluten to make that claim on their labels, consumers can be assured that a food product

expected to be gluten-free, is, in fact, free of gluten.

Q: Will these regulations really help?

A: Already a rapidly growing number of food products have gluten-free messages on their labels. Although “gluten-free” is not always printed in bright contrasting colors to be easily noticed, significantly more products are sporting the claim than even a few months ago.

The Gluten Intolerance Group of North America (known as GIG) has an incredibly useful website (www.gluten.net). Using this site, you can view food brands and determine whether a company has certified gluten-free products in a variety of food categories. For example, soy sauces generally contain wheat, but the GIG website lists Kikkoman as having gluten-free options. A quick supermarket search showed us that Kikkoman does have a certified gluten-free teriyaki sauce.

The dynamic food market is changing rapidly along with consumer demand for gluten-free options. Although gluten-intolerant people still will have challenges when eating out, it promises to get easier to avoid gluten.

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