

## Patient advice

# Gluten-free products

This leaflet explains changes to the availability of gluten-free products on NHS prescription across Bath and North East Somerset



### What is coeliac disease?

Coeliac disease is not an allergy or food intolerance. It is an autoimmune disease triggered by a protein called gluten, which is found in wheat, barley and rye.

When people with the disease eat gluten, their body responds by attacking the gluten in the small intestine, causing damage.

### What signs and symptoms do people with coeliac disease experience?

Symptoms range from mild to severe and commonly include bloating, excess wind, abdominal pain, constipation and/or diarrhoea and weight loss. Other symptoms include chronic fatigue (due to anaemia), headaches, mouth ulcers, skin problems, depression and infertility.

### What happens if a gluten-free diet is not followed?

People with untreated coeliac disease are more likely to develop osteoporosis, certain rare kinds of gastrointestinal cancer and other autoimmune disorders. This means it is very important to follow a gluten-free diet to treat coeliac disease.

### What is NHS Bath and North East Somerset CCG?

The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is responsible for the planning and purchasing of the vast majority of health services across the area. This includes hospital care, mental health and community services.

It works closely with all 26 GP practices across Bath and North East Somerset.

### Contact us:

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*This leaflet can be made available  
in other formats. Please call  
01225 831800 or email  
[BSCCG.information@nhs.net](mailto:BSCCG.information@nhs.net)*

### **Why can patients no longer have gluten-free products on prescription?**

In February 2017 a decision was taken by NHS Bath and North East Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to stop funding the prescription of gluten-free foods to all but the most vulnerable patients. This difficult decision was made because of the urgent need to make financial savings in the NHS. Visit the 'Get Involved' section of our website for more information.

### **Why was this decision made?**

The CCG decided to stop funding gluten-free foods on prescription because these foods are now much more widely available in supermarkets. The quality and variety of these products has also improved. By buying your own foods, the money we save can be used to fund other treatment.

In very exceptional circumstances, some vulnerable patients will be able to receive a restricted range of gluten-free products on prescription. GPs have been provided with advice to help identify those patients.

### **Which patients would be considered to be vulnerable or in a 'very exceptional circumstance'?**

Exceptional circumstances would include patients with significant clinical complexities or who are very vulnerable due to age, mental health and/or learning disabilities. Their prescription will be limited to bread loaves or bread/flour mix only.

### **What if patients can't get a supply of gluten-free products locally?**

The CCG has checked that there is a good spread of retail outlets across the county, stocking a wide variety of competitively priced gluten-free products.

### **What about the cost?**

We appreciate that the price of some gluten-free products is sometimes more expensive than non-gluten-free products although this difference is reducing due to competition and demand.

### **How to stay gluten-free**

We recommend sticking to foods that are naturally gluten-free (always read the label) rather than specialist products that have been manufactured to be gluten-free. These include:

- Most dairy products e.g. cheese, butter, milk and eggs
- Fruit and vegetables
- Meat and fish (although not bread crumbed or marinated)
- Potatoes
- Rice
- Flours made from rice, corn, soy, chickpeas (gram flour) buckwheat and potato
- Crackers made from rice or quorn
- Grains such as millet, quinoa and buckwheat

Following the Eatwell Guide for balanced eating will provide a gluten-free diet without need for any specialist dietary foods. This encourages choosing naturally gluten-

free carbohydrate-containing foods as part of a healthy, balanced diet. Search 'The Eatwell Guide' on NHS Choices' website: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk).

### **Other useful tips on avoiding gluten**

Home cooking is best. You know exactly what has gone into what you are eating.

Carefully check the labelling on any foods purchased. Many items may not appear to contain gluten but it is often present in items such as gravy, ketchup and sausages.

As a general rule if a product is not labelled as being gluten-free, it probably isn't.

Coeliac UK, an organisation that supports patients with coeliac disease, provides useful information on all aspects of the disease, including a directory of gluten-free foods and drinks: [www.coeliac.org.uk](http://www.coeliac.org.uk).

NHS Choices also has useful information about coeliac disease and treatment:

[www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Coeliac-disease/Pages/Treatment.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Coeliac-disease/Pages/Treatment.aspx)