

The Gluten-Free Diet – Getting Started Tips

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If you are considering starting the gluten-free diet, there are many different ways to get started. There is no question that the gluten-free diet is hot and getting hotter every day. Why? Hopefully it is because we are getting more people diagnosed with celiac disease. A second reason is that more consumers are waking up to the fact that food can affect how they feel, their cognitive functioning and their health and well being.

If you interviewed 20 different people in the gluten-free experts, you will find some variation in what coaching they would provide as to how to start and how to go about it. I offer these tips simply as a place to start with some recommendations offered based on what I did not know ten years ago and based on experience. As long as credit is given as listed above, the contents of this document may be freely shared on websites, blogs, and in publications. Credit constitutes the copyright symbol along with the author's name, title and website address as listed above.

1. Do your medical testing first

I cannot stress this enough. Please visit your primary care physician and get a celiac blood test prior to starting the gluten-free diet. This is the mistake that I along with many others have made with sincere regret. Medically speaking, it is valuable to know if you have a diagnosis of celiac disease. While you are getting tested, I would recommend that you have a nutritional profile done to look for any nutritional deficiencies as this is often an issue for people.

2. Get a reputable celiac resource guide (product listing)

If you can at all see your way free to purchase a reputable celiac resource guide, it will be a life-saver in your first year. If you simply cannot afford to do this, if you attend any local celiac support groups, a more experienced member may be willing to loan you theirs or sell you theirs for a reduced price. The Celiac Sprue Association (www.CSAceliacs.org) has been producing their product listing for many years. It costs around \$30.00 and it is well worth the price. In today's market with people diving into the gluten-free area, I advise a 'buyer beware' mentality and go with reputable sources for your products and information. The Celiac Sprue Association and the Gluten Intolerance Group of North America (www.GLUTEN.net) are two of the best groups you can find. Visit their websites for products and information.

3. Buyer Beware: Some 'gluten-free' cookbooks actually contain gluten

Some cookbooks that state they are 'gluten-free' on the cover actually contain gluten. Don't ask me how this happened or what the deal is on this. I know this because 9 years ago I actually purchased a cookbook that read – gluten-free, dairy-free, egg-free, nut-free, corn-free, soy-free on the cover- and it contain all of those ingredients in the recipes. You can authenticate this fact by looking at some of the

Amazon.com customer reviews on various cookbooks. If you read far enough down in some of the reviews, you can find customers complaining on this very issue. Purchasing a good solid cookbook is an investment in the quality of your life, just remember to beware of this issue.

4. Join a support group or start one in your area

I highly recommend joining a celiac or gluten-free support group in your area. If one does not exist, please consider starting one. There are many benefits from joining a group or starting one. Many people go for a year or so when they are new to the gluten-free diet and then they are educated and have the education and experience that they require. Some people stay members for a lifetime as they help educate new people. If there is no support group in your area and you need help in getting one started, contact me and I'll give you some ideas on how to start one. I've started several groups (not related to food) over the years and I am sure I can get you started.

5. Start with the foods you enjoy

What foods were you eating before going gluten-free? Start with the foods you love. If you love pasta, start there. If you love breaded meats or poultry, then that would be the place to start. There are many, many different types and brands of gluten-free pasta, and people have different tastes when it comes to gluten-free pasta. Some like rice pasta, some prefer corn or quinoa pasta. If you were big on sandwiches and breads, see the next tip for help with breads.

6. Replace breads with gluten-free rolls

Gluten-free breads are the most difficult areas in this special diet. While you can get some decent tasting gluten-free breads, many of the breads taste like cardboard. I made homemade gluten-free (and dairy-free, egg-free and other allergen free) for years. My bread tasted fantastic on the day it was baked, and then either it dried out or if I froze it, it basically had to be toasted to be any good.

I experimented for one year with natural food preservatives (not chemical), which did not make any difference. At the same time, I had perfected a delightful recipe that we used for dinner rolls as well as hamburger and hotdog rolls. These rolls came out of the freezer like they were freshly made (after they were warmed up of course). They were not crumbly and they certainly did not have to be toasted. This recipe, by the way, I have freely shared on one of my www.youtube.com videos so that anyone can have great rolls. Eventually I realized that we could use rolls in place of sandwich bread, because after all when you eat at a nice restaurant you mostly get your sandwich on a fancy roll.

After years of struggle, I switched my thinking from having bread to having rolls. I make this roll recipe for my baking classes or when I am doing a special event and I have had people throw the roll down and emphatically state that they don't believe that it is gluten-free because it tastes too good and the texture is too much like wheat or gluten. Yes, folks you can have great food without gluten, dairy, eggs

and other allergens – you just have to have a little knowhow and a few good recipes. Rethink your need for bread and switch to homemade rolls, which you can whip up in a jiffy and are far superior to what is currently on the market.

7. Above all do not eat too much rice

Rice is the mainstay of the gluten-free diet. It is in nearly every commercially made or bakery food as well as the gluten-free baking mixes. No one mentioned to me 10 years ago that my son could become allergic to rice while on the gluten-free diet. After a short 18 months on the gluten-free diet, he became allergic or intolerant to rice in any quantity. This was a memorable and excruciatingly difficult situation that left me forced to make all of his foods from scratch. It would take some three years before he could eat rice again, and only in smaller amounts.

When I started marketing my cookbook, which contains recipes for baked goods that are rice-free, I learned that developing an allergy or intolerance to rice is more common than I thought. We use a rotation diet to manage not eating too much rice or any other food. Not everyone requires a rotation diet. I would recommend that you have at least two ‘rice-free’ days a week to cut down on the volume of rice that you eat such to avoid this unbearable predicament.

8. There exists already an abundance of gluten-free products

In the last decade there has been an explosion of the number and types of gluten-free foods and dairy-free foods on the market. You don’t have to make it from scratch (although that is the way to save money). If you live in an area where you don’t have a great selection of gluten-free foods, you may have to either travel to a larger city or order on-line.

9. Buyer Beware: consider credibility in visiting GF websites

As gluten-free goes mainstream it is essential that you know who you are getting your information from. What is the person’s credibility and expertise? If you are looking at a website, I advise people to read the biography of the website owner(s). If there is no substantial bio or lengthy ‘about us’ section, I would keep clicking. You can’t go wrong, in my humble opinion, with the national celiac organizations who have been around for a long time and who are non-profit groups supported by volunteers.

Because of the growth in the gluten-free market, new people are being attracted to the market and in some cases are dishing out inaccurate information. Know who you are dealing with when it comes to information and products.

10. Make sure to get follow-up care and testing

Individuals with issues with food whether it be celiac, gluten-intolerance, food allergies or sensitivities are advised to get regular follow-up care and testing for their food issues for a variety of health reasons.