
WHAT EXACTLY IS GLUTEN? HERE'S EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW

[HTTPS://WWW.HEALTHLINE.COM/NUTRITION/WHAT-IS-GLUTEN](https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/what-is-gluten)

Gluten-free diets have become increasingly popular in recent years, especially due to the growing awareness of gluten-related disorders.

In turn, this has fueled a rapid rise in the mainstream availability of gluten-free food options. In fact, the gluten-free food industry was valued at \$4.3 billion in 2019.

The introduction – and increase in availability – of these products made what was once a difficult-to-stick-to diet much easier to follow.

Although gluten-free diets are more common, gluten does not pose a health risk to the majority of the U.S. population, as less than 1% of it is affected by celiac disease.

That said, people with celiac disease, non-celiac gluten sensitivity, and some other conditions must eliminate gluten from their diets to avoid harmful, adverse reactions.

This article reviews everything you need to know about gluten, including what it is, which foods contain it, who may need to follow a gluten-free diet, and how to eat a gluten-free diet.

What is gluten?

Gluten is a family of storage proteins – formally known as prolamins – that are naturally found in certain grains, such as wheat, barley, and rye.

Many prolamins fall under the gluten umbrella, but they're most commonly identified by the specific grains in which they're found. For instance, glutenins and gliadins are the prolamins in wheat, secalins are found in rye, and hordeins are found in barley.

In foods, gluten has a variety of functional culinary benefits. It gives many grain-based foods their soft chewy texture.

In bread, for instance, gluten proteins form an elastic network that stretches and traps gas, allowing the bread to rise and retain moisture.

Because of these unique physical properties, gluten is also frequently added to processed foods to improve texture and promote moisture retention.

SUMMARY

Gluten is a group of various proteins found in certain grains. It performs a variety of beneficial functions in bread products, but those with celiac disease cannot tolerate it.

Foods that contain gluten

Gluten may be found in a variety of whole and processed foods, including:

- Grains: whole wheat, wheat bran, barley, rye, triticale, spelt, kamut, couscous, farro, semolina, bulgur, farina, einkorn, durum, wheat germ, cracked wheat, matzo, mir (a cross between wheat and rye)
- Processed grain-based products: crackers, bread, breadcrumbs, pasta, seitan, wheat-containing soba noodles, some veggie burgers and other meat substitutes, cookies, pastries
- Other foods and beverages: barley malt, malt vinegar, soy sauce, certain salad dressings, sauces or gravies thickened with flour, bouillon and some broths, certain spice blends, flavored chips, beer, certain kinds of wine and liquor, some processed meats.

Because gluten is often used in food production as a thickener or stabilizer, it's not always clear whether a particular food contains it.

What's more, many commercial food operations share preparation equipment with gluten-containing foods. Thus, even if a food is inherently gluten-free, it could be contaminated with gluten during processing.

If you follow a strict gluten-free diet and are unsure about a particular food's gluten status, check the package for a gluten-free label or contact the manufacturer prior to purchasing it.

