

Words to Know

Food and Drug Administration (FDA): The part of the U.S. government that makes sure our food, medicines, and dietary supplements are safe and labeled correctly.

20 parts per million (ppm): This is the amount of gluten below which most people with Celiac Disease can safely eat a food. It is a very small amount — about the same as 1/8 of a teaspoon of regular flour spread across a large loaf of bread.

Gluten-free: A label the FDA allows food companies to put on their packages. It means the food contains less than 20 ppm of gluten. This label can go on foods that never had gluten in the first place (like bottled water or canned vegetables) or on foods that come in both regular and gluten-free versions (like regular oats versus gluten-free oats).

Cross-contact: When gluten from one food gets onto or into another food that is naturally gluten-free. This can happen during growing, processing, packaging, or cooking.

How to Read a Food Label

If a product says "gluten-free" on the package, it is most likely safe to eat. But remember — companies can change their ingredients at any time. It's a good idea to read the label every time, even if it's a food you've had before.

If a product does NOT say "gluten-free," here's how to figure out if it's safe:

1. Look at the bottom of the ingredients list for the word **"Contains."** By law, food labels must list if the product has any of the 9 major allergens: milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, soy, wheat, fish, shellfish, and sesame.
2. If **wheat** is listed in the "Contains" statement, the product is **NOT** gluten-free.
3. Important: Barley and rye are NOT on the list of 9 major allergens. This means a product can contain barley or rye without saying so in the "Contains" statement. You must always read the full ingredients list, not just the "Contains" line.

Always AVOID these ingredients:

- Wheat and wheat-family grains: spelt, kamut, farro, emmer, einkorn, durum, semolina, triticale
- Rye
- Barley, brewer's yeast
- Malt, malt extract, malt vinegar, malt flavoring, malt syrup
- Seitan

Note: Wheat starch is safe only if the product is labeled gluten-free. Specially purified (deglutinated) wheat starch is used in some gluten-free products in Europe and meets the under-20-ppm standard. Wheat starch that is not in a gluten-free labeled product should be avoided.

AVOID these ingredients unless the product is labeled gluten-free:

- Oats, oat bran, oat flour
- Yeast extract or autolyzed yeast
- Smoke flavoring
- Natural flavoring
- Modified food starch

Tricky Ingredients

Some ingredients sound like they might have gluten, but they are usually safe:

- **Maltodextrin:** This can come from different sources, including wheat. But even when it comes from wheat, the finished product has very little gluten and is considered safe on a gluten-free diet.
- **Dextrose and glucose syrup:** These are simple sugars. Even when made from wheat, they are so highly processed that essentially no gluten remains. They are considered safe.
- **Caramel color:** In the United States, this is almost always made from corn. Even when made from a gluten-containing source, the processing removes the gluten. It is considered safe.
- **Dextrin:** This can come from different sources, sometimes wheat. If a product contains dextrin and does not say "gluten-free," check with the manufacturer.
- **Distilled vinegar:** The distillation process removes gluten, so distilled vinegar is safe. Malt vinegar is NOT distilled and is not safe.
- **Wheatgrass and barley grass:** The grass itself does not contain gluten, but the products are often cross-contacted with the grain. Choose only products labeled gluten-free.

Warning Statements on Labels

- Statements like "may contain wheat" or "made in a facility that also processes wheat" are added voluntarily by the company — they are NOT required by the FDA and there are no rules about when they must be used.
- If a product says "gluten-free" AND has one of these warning statements, it is still safe. The gluten-free claim is the one that is legally regulated.
- Studies show these warning labels are not reliable indicators of actual gluten content. Products without a warning statement can contain just as much gluten as products with one. Gluten has been found most often in oat-containing products carrying a warning statement — another reason to eat only oats labeled certified gluten-free.

Medicines

- **Over-the-counter medicines** (the kind you buy without a prescription) must follow the same FDA labeling rules as food. Read the inactive ingredients on the package. If it lists wheat, barley, or rye, the medicine is not gluten-free.
- **Prescription medicines** are NOT required to list allergens on the label. Check the inactive ingredients and ask your pharmacist or the drug company if you're not sure whether a medicine contains gluten.

Dietary Supplements (Vitamins, Minerals, etc.)

- Dietary supplements must follow the same FDA labeling rules as food.
- When possible, choose supplements that are labeled gluten-free to help avoid gluten contamination.

Alcohol

- Wine, fruit cider (without added barley malt), and distilled liquor (vodka, gin, rum, tequila, whiskey, bourbon) are gluten-free. Distillation removes gluten, even from grain-based liquors.
- Beer, ale, lager, and malt beverages made with barley or wheat are NOT safe.
- Beer made from naturally gluten-free grains (such as sorghum, millet, rice, or buckwheat) and labeled "gluten-free" is safe.
- Beer labeled "gluten-removed," "gluten-reduced," or "processed to remove gluten" is NOT considered safe. These are barley-based beers treated with an enzyme. Laboratory studies have found that gluten fragments capable of triggering an immune reaction remain in many of these products, and the standard gluten test used on them may not detect these fragments. Some people with celiac disease have shown an immune response to gluten-removed beer.
- Flavored beverages, hard seltzers, and pre-mixed cocktails should be checked individually, as flavorings and additives may contain gluten.

Symbols and Certifications

Several independent organizations test food products and award a certification mark showing the product contains less than 20 ppm of gluten — and in some programs, less than 10 ppm. Companies must apply for these certifications and undergo review of their manufacturing processes and regular product testing.

You do NOT need to buy only certified products. Any product labeled "gluten-free" must meet the FDA standard. But certification provides an additional layer of verification that can be reassuring, especially for higher-risk products like oats, flours, and baking mixes.

