



GLUTEN FREE SOCIAL AND TRAVEL GUIDE



INTRODUCTION

Social Guide

One of the hardest adjustments to make when it comes to going off gluten permanently is the social aspect. As humans we are naturally social beings. A lot of our activities revolve around food. We go out to eat, we have people over, we get invited out to their homes, we go to events where food is served: weddings, functions and so on. We go out for business lunches. We go on picnics. We travel and we stop at the petrol garage and quickly run into the convenience store to grab a few snacks. We make a quick decision to get a take-away.

Unfortunately all of this changes when you go gluten free. The sad reality is that gluten-free is just not an option at a lot of these events, restaurants and take-away. It becomes something you have to plan around and for. It can take away the spontaneity and this can dampen your enthusiasm for such occasions. But if you know what challenges you will encounter, and how to deal with them, then you will be prepared to face and overcome them.

So how do you work around these challenges?

Getting invited out to friends and family

You've been invited out to a friend's house or family. The first thing you can do is inform them that you are gluten-free. Remember to use the correct terminology. If you sound like you don't know what you're talking about or aren't sure of your own condition, this will make it harder for others to take you seriously and they might think that you are just on a fad diet. If you have non-celiac gluten sensitivity, you might say "Just to let you know I have a gluten sensitivity/intolerance and I am avoiding it because it just doesn't sit well with me". If you have Celiac Disease, just come right out with it and say "I have recently discovered/been diagnosed with Celiac Disease which means I can't eat gluten at all."

You may get some teasing or flack, like "Oh so you've also joined the fad now". Make sure you inform them that in your case, it is not a fad, but that unfortunately you have to stick to it as it actually makes you ill.

The next thing to remember is that not everybody is clued up or as knowledgeable about your condition as you are. A lot of people have no idea what gluten is or what it is found in. Most people think gluten is just wheat. They might not be in a situation to cater for you due to lack of experience and knowledge in this regard. Remember it isn't their fault and neither is yours.

You could offer to bring your own food (although I don't recommend this especially with close friends and family, as they might always expect you to and you don't want it to become a habit, but rather use it as an opportunity to educate them and assist them in so that when they do invite you over, they know what you can and can't eat. This takes time, so remain patient).



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A good thing to keep in mind is that your health remains your responsibility. When it comes to the preparation and cooking of food by others, we should trust they know what they are doing but also remember that it is important to understand that the risk remains yours.

Social Events

Social events and functions are one of the hardest things to navigate, especially if you are going as a guest or plus one of a guest. You often have no control or say in the matter of what food will be served. I would suggest to try find out what kind of food will be served. If you know that there will be a buffet for example with vegetables and salads and some cooked meats, it is likely that you will be able to eat some of the food presented. If you are in a position to say something to the organizer, then it may be a good idea to ask what food options will be available for people with allergies and in that way open the door for requesting a gluten free meal. The same can be said for a wedding if you personally know the bride or bridegroom. Inform them of your intolerance and hope they will cater to your needs.

RESTAURANTS

Eating out at restaurants is an enjoyable, sociable thing to do. However it can become a logistical nightmare when faced with a condition like Celiac Disease. Here are my top tips for eating out:

1. Immediately inform the waiter that have a condition called Celiac Disease and cannot consume gluten. Be careful about saying "gluten allergy or intolerance (unless you have NCGS) Unfortunately due to the prevalence of gluten-free fad diets, just about everyone is or has tried to go gluten-free because they think it is a cool thing to do and normally the waiter won't take you seriously.
2. You have every right to ask the waiter to check with the chef if the meal you are interested in has gluten in it. Normally they are quick to oblige.
3. Be wary of ordering anything that has a sauce or gravy, or is marinated. Always ask if unsure.
4. Avoid deep fried or crumbed foods as they certainly contain gluten.
5. When you order make sure to stress it again, "Please remember no gluten, no wheat and no flour".
6. Sticking to natural wholefoods is always best.
7. Look for foods labelled gluten-free on the menu.



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Vacations and travel

Vacations and travel pose one of the biggest challenges to anyone with a food intolerance or autoimmune condition like Celiac Disease.

Long car journeys pose the biggest problem. A lot of the time, people quickly run into the shop located at the petrol garage to buy snacks, a pie, donuts or something typically that contains gluten. However when you have Celiac Disease you can't do this. It is very unlikely you will find gluten-free foods at such stops.

So what do you do? Here are my recommendations:

1. Pack your own food. When all you have along the way of your journey is garage stops, you'll be grateful for packing your own food. Pack things like fruit, individual yogurts, gluten-free grain crackers, dried fruit, gluten-free fruit and date bars. Gluten-free wraps, vegetable sticks like cucumber, carrot, celery and dips like hummus. Roasted veg, salads, chicken strips, cold meats. There are a lot of options available to you that consist of healthy, wholefoods that you can take with. Keep your food in a cooler bag.
2. You can plan ahead and check restaurant menus online if you plan to be eating out along the way or while on vacation.
3. If you are traveling by air, you can go online and request a gluten free meal with your airline. Make sure to book all your meals with connecting flights as this is not done automatically.
4. If you plan to travel to a foreign place it may be a good idea to first see if the country or place of choice caters for gluten free. What kind of foods do they mostly serve or sell? Be careful as you don't want to be stuck in a foreign country with nothing to eat!
5. Ask yourself questions like : What language be a barrier in making known my dietary needs? Will I be able to read food labels and determine what I can eat? What kind of food does my destination offer?
6. Expect difficulties and challenges as unfortunately a gluten free lifestyle comes with it. Your attitude is what will determine how you handle such challenges.
7. Retain your sense of humor and it will get you over the worst.
8. Stock up when and where you can on gluten free convenience foods before or while traveling such as gluten free pasta, rice, crackers, etc and always take something with you in case you can't find anything gluten-free.
9. Remember ALL fruit and veg is naturally gluten free, so you won't starve!
10. Remember that if you stick to natural, whole foods you will be fine. Be careful with grains though. Take along your allowed list when traveling or have a copy on your phone so that you can refer to it if you are not sure.

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Most importantly have fun!