

Gluten-Free Diet for Beginners: 3 Easy Tips for Success

You wipe a bead of sweat from your brow as you toss the box of pasta into the garbage can. You've cleaned all the gluten out of your pantry. Now what?

You're here because you want to follow a gluten-free diet. Maybe your doctor or other health practitioner told you to try it, or maybe your sister-in-law told you it was the solution to all your problems. You're not even sure what gluten is. You just know you can't take the pain, the digestive trouble, the feeling like crap anymore.

I'm Melanie Sparks, Wellness Coach, and Certified Nutrition Specialist, and I feel your pain. I was once plagued by **awful digestive symptoms**, headaches, joint pain, inflammation, and more.

Until I quit eating gluten.

Now I help others eat and feel better by providing advice, tips, and even meal plans!

There's so much information out there about a gluten-free diet, and you're too overwhelmed to make sense of it all. Where should you start?

I will break it down for you by giving you 3 easy tips for gluten-free diet success. But first...

What is a Gluten-Free Diet?

A gluten-free diet has become very popular in the last decade. You've probably seen products advertised as gluten-free at the grocery store, or maybe even as options on a menu. But what is gluten, and why should you choose to avoid it?

Gluten is a protein found in grains like wheat, barley, and rye. It's what makes baked goods chewy and soft. For most people, gluten is harmless, but for people with celiac disease or non-celiac gluten sensitivity, gluten can *cause health problems and should be avoided*.¹

What the Heck is Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease is a hereditary, auto-immune condition where the consumption of gluten leads to damage to the small intestine. Because of this damage, nutrients cannot be absorbed, and continued consumption of gluten can lead to a wide range of serious health problems like anemia, liver failure, infertility, small bowel cancers, and more.

If your doctor has diagnosed you with celiac disease, it is very important to avoid any gluten. Even small traces of it can cause damage. According to the Celiac Disease Foundation, it is estimated that celiac disease affects 1 in 100 people, but only about 30% of those are correctly diagnosed with the disease².

What the Heck is Gluten Sensitivity?

Thanks to researchers, we now know there is something called non-celiac gluten sensitivity or NCGS. With NCGS the immune response is less severe but can lead to symptoms like diarrhea, fatigue, and abdominal pain.³

If you think you have either of those conditions, it is best to check with your doctor. There are also questions you can answer online, and [symptom checkers](#) to help you decide if you should ask your doctor about being tested.

¹

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/in-depth/gluten-free-diet/art-20048530>

² <https://celiac.org/about-celiac-disease/what-is-celiac-disease/>

³ <https://celiac.org/non-celiac-gluten-sensitivity-shows-distinct-immune-response/>

What Does a Gluten-Free Diet Look Like?

If you remember what we talked about above, gluten is contained in grains like barley, rye, and wheat. Most of us probably aren't out here eating a lot of barley or rye, but wheat is an ingredient in **lots** of foods, especially pre-packaged foods.

Bread and pasta are the main foods that contain wheat, but many packaged foods contain some form of wheat or gluten used as a thickener, or as a coating on something to prevent sticking.

Like the packets of sauce mixes like taco mix, chili mix, or gravy mix, and the crunchy coating on your favorite french fries.

You may be thinking, so if it's in everything I buy how can I avoid it? This question leads us to the **3 tips for success**.

Tip 1: Eat Whole Foods

This doesn't mean eating at the grocery store Whole Foods, but **choosing foods that have not been processed**. For example, whole fruits and vegetables are in their pure form, and nothing has been taken away from or added to them. Proteins like meats, eggs, beans, and nuts are also whole foods.

A simple rule to remember is to *follow the perimeter of the grocery store* to find whole foods.

Tip 2: Look for the Gluten-Free Labels

According to the Food and Drug Administration, in order for a product to be labeled as gluten-free it **must contain less than 20ppm (parts per million) of gluten**, which is the lowest detectable amount.⁴

If something is processed and in a package that is not labeled as gluten-free, even if you don't see wheat, barley, or rye on the label, you should avoid it.

If there is no gluten-free label, *assume that the product contains some amount of gluten*, or has been processed in a facility that also processes and handles gluten and may contain trace amounts.

Tip 3: Follow a Meal Plan

Take the guesswork out of eating a gluten-free diet by **downloading a meal plan**. A meal plan will walk you through what steps you need to take, starting from a grocery list to recipes and how to prepare each meal.

Having the meals for your week already planned out makes getting used to eating gluten-free less overwhelming. You will learn more as you go, and having a variety of meals planned out for you to try can help you learn what you like and don't like, and will make it easier to succeed at a gluten-free diet.

Click here to access **my free 14-day meal plan** perfect for gluten-free beginners!

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<https://www.fda.gov/consumers/consumer-updates/gluten-free-means-what-it-says#:~:text=As%20one%20of%20the%20criteria,using%20valid%20scientific%20analytical%20tools>.

Moving Forward

Going gluten-free can be a challenge initially, but plenty of delicious foods are naturally gluten-free. Fruits and vegetables, lean proteins, beans, nuts, and other whole grains like brown rice or quinoa are great options.

Not great at cooking from scratch? Gluten-free alternatives to traditional foods are everywhere; like bread, crackers, pizza crusts, ice cream, and even frozen prepared meals.

Cutting out all gluten is the only treatment for celiac disease and non-celiac gluten sensitivity.

Of course, if you want to change your diet, you should consult your doctor, nutritionist, or another health practitioner first. They can test you for celiac disease, confirm it with a diagnosis, and teach you what precautions to take moving forward.

Once you start to follow this diet, **you will improve**. Even if you haven't gotten a specific diagnosis, better digestion, less bloating, less brain fog, and more energy are just some of the benefits of a gluten-free diet.

For beginners to the gluten-free diet, remember the three tips as you start: eat whole foods, look for the gluten-free label, and follow a meal plan.

You'll find that once you've mastered these three steps, you are less overwhelmed, and will be ready for a more advanced guide to a gluten-free diet.

Download your **free 14-day meal plan**, then check out the articles below for more tips, and recipes.

Want a more detailed plan tailored to you and your needs? **Contact me to get a customized meal plan.**