



Mealtime Memo

for Child Care

Gluten: What is It?

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Gluten: What is It?

From magazine articles to commercials, from food items on grocery store shelves to mealtime conversations, gluten-free eating has grown in popularity, and it is commonly a hot topic for many. But what is gluten; where is it found; and why would someone need to avoid it? If you are like many who are not familiar with gluten and gluten-free eating, continue reading to learn the basics about gluten.

What is gluten? It is a natural protein found in wheat, barley, rye, and triticale, as well as foods made from these grains. In fact, any ingredient made from wheat, barley, or rye

contains gluten, unless treated to be a gluten-free version of these grains. Gluten is used to create a sense of structure in food. Take yeast rolls as an example, gluten helps the dough rise, keep its shape, and it also provides the chewy texture.



There are some common and uncommon sources of gluten. Most common and easy-to-identify sources include: yeast breads, pastas, crackers, cereals, croutons, quick breads, flour tortillas, and breading or coating mixes made from wheat, barley, or rye. On the other hand, foods made with by-products of these grains may be

unexpected or uncommon sources of gluten. Additionally, food ingredients such as thickening agents from wheat or food starch, malt vinegar made



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from barley, or soy sauce are a few hidden sources of gluten. However, reading labels is a great way to help find gluten sources in foods.

People may avoid gluten for different reasons, either a medical need or personal preference. However, a person diagnosed with celiac disease must avoid all gluten. In celiac disease, even trace amounts of gluten can damage the small intestine and cause long-term health problems. The only treatment for celiac disease is the total elimination of gluten from the diet. Others may have an intolerance to gluten. In cases of intolerance, gluten promotes stomach upset, bloating, and other gastrointestinal symptoms of intolerance. The intolerance reaction is not the same as the damage caused by celiac disease, but those with a gluten intolerance may need to avoid gluten. Lastly, some individuals prefer to avoid gluten for personal preference and not a diagnosed medical condition that requires such.

In summary, gluten is a natural part of wheat, rye, and barley. Some people need to avoid gluten for health reasons such as celiac disease or gluten intolerance. Others may choose to avoid gluten as a personal preference. It is important to read labels to determine if a food contains an ingredient with gluten. Find out more information about gluten in the diet, by visiting the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness at www.celiaccentral.org.



Fruit of the Month: Pears



Pear orchards can be traced back thousands of years to wild pear trees in Western Asia and Southern Europe. Today, more than 80 percent of the annual US pear harvest are from orchards in the states of Washington and Oregon.

Compared to other tree fruits, pears are unique in that they ripen best off of the tree. Pears in the market will be firm; when ripe, pears are juicy and sweet. To ripen a pear, place it in a paper bag and leave it on the counter. Check it daily for ripeness. Pears are ripe when the neck, the flesh that surrounds the stem area, gives to slight pressure. Not all pears will change color when ripe. Green Bartlett pears go from a green to yellow color, whereas red Bartletts do not change color. Both green and red Anjou pears stay the same color when they ripen. Bartlett pears are the major variety in canned products.

Enjoy pears fresh, canned, baked, broiled, or poached. Additionally, they make an excellent snack, ingredient in a salad, or side dish for meals.



Recipe of the Month

Pear Party Salsa

Celebrate National Pear Month in December with a variety of pear dishes. For a tasty and nutritious pear dish, try this Pear Party Salsa listed on the What's Cooking? USDA Mixing Bowl website at <http://www.whatscooking.fns.usda.gov/recipes/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap/pear-party-salsa>.

Ingredients:

- 1 pear, cored and finely chopped
- 1 apple, cored and finely chopped
- 2 kiwifruit, cored and finely chopped
- 1 orange, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- Cinnamon graham crackers (optional)

Directions:

1. Combine pear, apple, kiwi, and orange in a medium-size bowl.
2. Pour honey and lemon juice over fruit and gently toss.
3. Scoop up bites of fruit salsa using bites of cinnamon graham crackers (optional).

Nutrition Fact: Protein

Protein is an essential nutrient needed for normal growth and development. It is part of body tissues including muscles, bones, blood, skin, and other organs. Proteins are often called “building blocks” because they supply the body with amino acids that build muscle and repair tissues. Some amino acids are called “essential” because they must be provided by food. Your body uses these essential amino acids to make other amino acids, also known as “nonessential” amino acids. Your body uses amino acids from normal tissue breakdown and food sources to make new protein for a variety of body processes and needs.

Animal-based proteins, such as lean meats, poultry, fish, eggs, milk, and milk products, are complete proteins because they provide all of the essential amino acids. Plant-based foods, on the other hand, are not complete proteins because they lack one or more essential amino acids. Vegetarians who eat a variety of grains, dry beans and peas, and processed soy products such as tofu, nuts and seeds throughout the day can get enough protein and amino acids for good health. Eating a variety of foods, including animal or plant-based proteins, will meet protein needs.

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