



# Restaurant Dining: Seven Tips for Staying Gluten Free

GIG Education  
Bulletin

Updated Dec. 2006

## Tips for dining away from home

### 1. Selection of eating establishment.

Your success at gluten-free dining will be determined by a number of factors, including the type of restaurant you choose.

Be careful in restaurants where language may create a communication barrier.

Food service workers may not easily understand your dietary restrictions.

Allow extra time to discuss your needs for a gluten-free meal. Fast food, quick-service restaurants, and those with a standard menu may have little time to thoroughly check ingredients.

Finer dining establishments offer a less-hurried atmosphere and usually have more time to meet your needs.

Call the restaurant the day before or earlier the same day. Speak to the chef to discuss your meal options. This will increase the quality of your dining experience.

The chefs in finer dining establishments are generally aware of gluten and can be very helpful.

### 2. Dine early or late.

Time your meal earlier or later than the busiest meal time. You will have more time and easier access to the people who can help you. Even the most cooperative server may not have the time you need during “rush hour.”

### 3. Explain your dietary restrictions briefly.

Example: (smile)

“Hi, I may need your help with my menu selection. I am on a medically restricted diet and am unable to eat grain products. This includes wheat, rye, barley and foods made with these grains. I have some questions and need your help.”

Enlisting the interest and cooperation of your server is essential. They can be your ally or your biggest stumbling block. Medic alert bracelets help to give credibility to the seriousness of your diet restrictions.

### 4. Ask detailed questions.

Use the GIG restaurant card. Ask that the card be taken to the chef for more assistance in selecting safe menu items. The only person who really knows what went into a dish is the person who made it!

You may need to ask extensive questions about the foods and preparation. Be very specific in your questions about each item.

## Helpful aids

• **GIG Restaurant Card** – *The English version is a plastic credit card-sized card to carry with you at all times. It is simple yet provides helpful information to the chef and other staff.*

• **Foreign Language Restaurant Help** – *GIG offers similar information in several languages. Many languages appear on one sheet.*

• **Quick Start** – *A fast and easy way to learn about the gluten-free diet.*

• **GIG's Gluten-Free Diet Instruction** – *A very detailed diet guideline.*

Below are some foods and the potential problems involved with them:

- **Salads:** The possibility of contamination lies in the cleanliness of the boards used to chop ingredients and the addition of croutons or salad dressings containing unsafe ingredients. Ask for dressing to be served on the side. No croutons or other bread products.

- **Salad Dressings and Marinades:** Salad dressings and marinades may contain thickeners or other unsafe ingredients. Try ordering a lemon wedge and oil on the side, wine or balsamic vinegar and oil, or bring a small container of dressing from home if you are unsure of the restaurant's salad dressing.

- **Soups and Sauces:** Soup bases are often used as a foundation for soups and sauces. Bases contain ingredients comparable to bouillon or broth, i.e., hydrolyzed vegetable protein, natural flavors, etc., and should be carefully checked. Roux (pronounced "roo") is the thickening for most sauces and is a combination of butter and flour. It is safest to avoid sauces. Canned sauces are also used in restaurants, so you may be able to check the ingredient listing. Soup base will sometimes appear in sauces.

- **Prime Rib and Other Meats:** If prime rib is too rare for the customer's taste, the cook may "cook" it in a pot of au jus until it reaches the desired doneness. Au jus may come from a can or mix and contain unidentified hydrolyzed vegetable protein (HVP). Seasoning is often used in preparing meats; their ingredients should be verified. Self-basting turkeys and imitation bacon bits may contain HVP or textured vegetable protein (TVP) and need to be checked for safety before using.

- **Fried Foods:** The oil used to deep-fry foods may be used for both breaded and non-breaded items, in which case they should be avoided. In large restaurants where French fries are cooked in separate fryers, there is less chance of contamination.

- **Rice, Starches, and Hash Browns:** Many hash browns are frozen and pre-packaged with starch added. Ask what other ingredients have been added while cooking them. Many rice pilafs may have seasonings or added ingredients that you may need to avoid. Plain steamed or baked rice cooked in water is a good choice.

- **Dairy Products:** Non-dairy products are sometimes used instead of dairy products in restaurants. The three most frequently used non-dairy products are non-dairy creamer, non-dairy "sour cream" topping, and non-dairy whipped topping. Verify if the ingredients in the non-dairy substitute are okay.

**5. Have your food prepared on a clean cooking surface, with clean utensils.**

Check if breaded or gluten-containing foods have been cooked on the surface beforehand. Suggest using foil to cook on if this is a problem.

**6. Confirm your order before eating.**

Is it the "special" meal you ordered? Were your instructions followed?

**7. Thank your food server.**

Leave a generous tip for good service and if you have an extra GIG brochure, leave it with the management for their information. Return. Patronize the establishment again!

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This information should not be used to diagnose or treat celiac disease. See your health care team for diagnosis and treatment options specifically for you.

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*GIG is a nonprofit 501c3 national organization providing support for per persons with gluten intolerances, in order to live health, productive lives. GIG Branches provide support at a local level.*

*To make a donation or become a volunteer to GIG, visit our Web site or call the office at 253-833-6655.*