

CROSS CONTAMINATION.... FOOD SAFETY AND GLUTEN FREE

Meeting our customers' wants and needs, especially when it comes to their health needs, is essential. To better serve our clients, foodservice professionals must continue to pay attention to food allergy concerns



as offering **gluten-free** products is one of the fastest growing segments in the industry.

People who suffer from Celiac Disease are forced to follow a gluten-free diet. According to the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness (NFCA), "**Celiac Disease** is an autoimmune digestive disease that damages the villi of the small intestine and interferes with absorption of nutrients from food. Essentially the body is attacking itself every time a person with celiac consumes gluten."

Gluten is found in all forms of wheat, barley and rye, as well as some more hidden sources such as gravies or soy sauce.

How many people are forced to follow a gluten-free diet? The NFCA shares that **one in every 133 Americans** has Celiac Disease and that an estimated **2.8 million Americans** from all races, ages, and genders suffer from the disease.

As the gluten-free market increases, foodservice professionals should become educated on not only gluten-free ingredients, but also proper handling and preparation techniques to prevent cross-contamination.

Having a kitchen staff that is educated about the needs of those following a gluten-free diet is essential to incorporating gluten-free options in the menu. In order to remain gluten-free, the food **cannot** come into contact with any food containing gluten, as well as any equipment or utensils that were used to prepare gluten products.



Here are some tips to follow when **preparing gluten-free entrees**:

- **Do not prepare gluten-free foods on the same surface** used to prepare food containing gluten, unless it has been thoroughly cleaned
- Have a **separate set of utensils** to be used for gluten-free food products or thoroughly clean utensils that have come in contact with gluten foods
- Have **completely separate equipment**, such as dishes, cutting boards, and baking forms for the preparation of gluten-free products
- **Do not use the same toaster** for gluten-free bread and regular bread
- **Do not deep-fry gluten-free foods in the same oil** as food items that contain gluten
- **Avoid using flours that contain gluten in the same area where gluten-free food is prepared** since wheat flour can stay airborne for hours and contaminate surfaces
- **Clearly label gluten-free products**, if possible, **color code** all gluten-free food containers, utensils, and equipment
- **Designate specific kitchen** areas for preparing gluten-free food
- **Do not use pasta water** to rinse your vegetables and fruit

Here is a short list of some **safe gluten-free substitutes**:

- Almond Meal Flour
- Buckwheat
- Coconut Flour
- Corn Flour
- Cornstarch
- Garbanzo Bean Flour (Chickpea Flour)
- White Rice Flour

Here are two sites with gluten-free recipes to help get your start in this marketplace: Celiac.com and the [NFCA](#) .

This gluten-free industry is a growing marketplace that could increase customer satisfaction and loyalty, while giving celiac customers a safe and credible place to enjoy gluten-free meals. It could even **generate revenue** from alternate sources that would not typically eat at your site- sales people, local community, senior citizens, etc.

How do you prevent cross-contamination? Have you put gluten-free options on your menu?