



Healthcare professional guide: Gluten Free Foods

Diagnosis

Gluten free foods may only be **prescribed** on an FP10 where patients have a diagnosed “established gluten enteropathy” such as Coeliac disease or dermatitis herpetiformis (ACBS criteria).

Diagnosis of Coeliac disease requires serological testing. If the result is positive, this should be followed by referral to Gastroenterology for biopsy (see [NICE CG 86 Coeliac Disease](#) for further guidance on diagnosis).

Patients/carers should be advised that for at least 6 weeks **prior to and during** the diagnostic process (both serology and biopsy) patients **MUST** continue to consume a gluten containing diet (gluten containing food/s as part of 2 or more meals every day) otherwise the diagnosis may not be clear.

Patients should not commence a gluten free diet until diagnosis is confirmed by biopsy. Adopting a gluten free diet earlier may lead to a false negative result on biopsy, and will mean that gluten free foods cannot be prescribed on an NHS prescription.

Following diagnosis, patients should be given adequate information about their condition to make sure they understand it and the importance of strict compliance with a gluten free diet.

Prescribing gluten free foods in Buckinghamshire

If Coeliac disease or another gluten enteropathy is confirmed (by serology and biopsy), gluten free foods can be prescribed.

- **Prescribed gluten free food allowance per patient = 8 units per patient, per month** from the following food groups only:

| Food group | Quantity | Usual pack size |
|-------------------------|---------------|---|
| Bread, rolls, baguettes | 1 unit = 400g | Bread and bread rolls come in a variety of pack sizes from 105g (¼ unit) – 612g (1½ units) therefore consideration needs to be given to this when prescribing |
| Mixes | 1 unit = 250g | Most gluten free mixes are available in 500g (2 units) or 1000g (4 units) packs |

For example: Each month a patient could request 4 loaves of bread (4 units) + 1kg bag bread mix (4 units) = 8 units

There are a wide variety of gluten free foods available on prescription and some manufacturers produce sample packs of gluten free foods, allowing patients to sample gluten free foods before setting up a repeat prescription of their preferred items from the food groups above.

Why has the guidance changed?

The NHS does not provide food on prescription for other groups of patients whose diseases are associated with, or affected by, the type of food they eat but which can be managed by eating a diet naturally free from certain ingredients (such as food allergies).

Which gluten free foods should I prescribe?

Some gluten free substitute foods are more palatable than others. Many patients find that the makes of gluten free breads which can be both prescribed and purchased in supermarkets are often the most palatable e.g. Warburtons, Genius, Lifestyle. These makes of gluten free bread are also among the most cost effective to prescribe (see [Bucks Net Formulary](#) and [Healthcare professional guide: Gluten free - Most cost effective foods](#))

What could patients choose instead of prescribed gluten free foods?

Many widely available carbohydrate foods are naturally gluten free (e.g. rice, potatoes, lentils, quinoa) and following a gluten free diet without access to gluten free substitute foods (either prescribed or purchased) is possible.

In addition, gluten-free substitute foods are now more widely available in supermarkets (including smaller stores) and health food shops, although these products are generally more expensive than the equivalent carbohydrate foods that contain gluten.

Patients are not being asked to purchase all the gluten free substitute foods which they may require, but where their use per month exceeds 8 units we are asking them to purchase the extra units which they require. This means that patients overall spend on carbohydrate foods will be similar to that of people without a gluten enteropathy.

To achieve a healthy diet people with a gluten enteropathy can choose to purchase additional gluten free substitute foods or to purchase additional naturally gluten free carbohydrate foods e.g. rice, potatoes, lentils, quinoa (which are likely to be cheaper).

Does this guidance apply to all?

We understand that the proposal to reduce gluten-free foods on prescription may have an impact on some people with a gluten enteropathy. As such, we consulted both the public and health professionals employed by Buckinghamshire CCG and Buckinghamshire Healthcare NHS Trust (including GPs, clinicians and dietitians) to hear their views and to ensure that we were aware of the likely effects/impact before making this decision. The majority of members of the public and health care professionals were in favour of a restriction in prescribing, with 8 units per patient per month (comprising bread, mixes, pasta and flour) being the preferred option. In January 2018 the Department of Health and Social Care recommended restricting prescribing of gluten free foods to bread and mixes Buckinghamshire CCG has adopted this recommendation.

Buckinghamshire CCG appreciate that this change in guidance may concern some patients and therefore a patient information leaflet has also been developed ([Gluten free - Patient information leaflet](#)) which explains why this change in prescribing has occurred. The leaflet also gives brief advice on naturally occurring gluten free foods, to enable patients to continue to eat a healthy, gluten free diet even if they choose not to purchase any gluten free substitute foods in addition to the 8 units which can be prescribed.

Individual Funding Requests

Buckinghamshire CCG envisage that 8 units per month of prescribed gluten free foods, together with naturally occurring gluten free foods and/or purchased gluten free foods will be adequate to maintain a healthy diet for the majority of patients.

Where a GP or other healthcare professional feels strongly that for an individual patient 8 units per month is inadequate), a written exceptional case for a larger supply may be submitted by the GP to the Individual Funding Request panel bucks.ifrrequests@nhs.net

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