

The Definitive Guide to Eating Out Gluten-Free

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So you're eating gluten free because of gluten intolerance, celiac disease or simply because you wanted to take advantage of the anti-inflammatory benefits of the gluten-free lifestyle. As it turns out, even though you've sworn off foods containing gluten and you're enjoying the health benefits of gluten-free eating, your co-workers and friends aren't on the same page.



Unlike those following a low-carb diet or a vegan or paleo lifestyle, going gluten free and dining out can be more daunting. To go vegan or paleo or low-carb, the items to toss off the plate or exclude when ordering are fairly straightforward. For gluten free eating, possible challenges can be more indirect and hard to overcome when food is being prepared by someone else in a kitchen with staff that may not understand where you're coming from.

Availability, cost and safety of gluten-free foods and ingredients make the possibility of cross-contamination more likely when out. And hidden traces of gluten can appear in foods, fillers, sauces and other cooking aids commonly used in restaurants without much consideration — from emulsifiers to fillers to thickeners. Who knows what's in that salad dressing? Or even that sushi?! Not to worry. You CAN eat out, gluten free.

How to Dine Out and Have Fun Even if You're Gluten-Free



Fret not, gluten-free folks! You don't have to resign yourself to eating at home three times a day for the rest of your life. Home-cooked meals are undoubtedly the best way to prevent yourself from getting "glutened", you can dine out, treat yourself and simply relax (hurray for no dishes to clean) without fear of gluten, if you follow a few simple guidelines.

Luckily, the increasing awareness of celiac disease, wheat allergies, and gluten sensitivity has prompted restaurants of all sizes to offer gluten-free options. Del Posto, an upscale Italian restaurant in New York, is a good example. In 2013, the restaurant decided to offer a gluten-free option of every pasta dish in their menu. Plus, technology has made it possible to locate gluten-free friendly establishments without calling every restaurant in your area. Read on to learn how you can master the art of dining out gluten-free.

Finding Gluten-Free Friendly Restaurants

Find restaurants with gluten-free menus in the area where you're supposed to dine out ahead of time. These days, it's easier to do your little homework through the following steps:

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1. Look up a restaurant's menu online.

Most restaurants' websites display and update their menus regularly. Here's a [sample menu posted by Senza](#), a gluten-free restaurant in New York's Greenwich Village. In Chicago, Vietnamese restaurant Saigon Sisters caters to gluten-free diners by specifically stating the option on their website's FAQ.

If you don't have a restaurant in mind yet, consider typing in your location + gluten free on Google Search.

When possible, download restaurant menus online ahead of time and share them with friends and family whom you're eating with. The iconic Cheeseburger in Paradise restaurant, with locations dotted across 16 states, is a good example. You can download their [gluten-free menu](#) from their website. For unfamiliar menu terms, the [Unsafe Gluten-Free Food list](#) and other [names for gluten](#) will come in handy.

2. Use apps and consult online databases.

[Find Me Gluten Free](#) is an app that can help you find restaurants offering gluten-free menus. Their rating system and reviews from fellow gluten-free folks can help you find the right gluten-free dining venue. You can simply type in a town or city, or allow the app to use your current location to search nearby restaurants. Once you've narrowed down your choices, you can call these restaurants from the app itself and get directions once you decide where you're going to eat.

Other helpful apps and resources worth looking into are the following:

- [The Gluten-Free Food Service \(GFFS\) list of Certified Establishments](#)
- [Gluten-Free Travel Site list of restaurants](#)
- [iEatOut Gluten Free & Allergy Free app](#)
- [AllergyEats app](#)



3. Opt for restaurants who make their food from scratch.

Chances are, these restaurants cater to diners with specific dietary needs and restrictions because they are more meticulous about their ingredients. The relaxed atmosphere of fine dining restaurants also increases the likelihood that they can devote more time to diners with special requests. Even Bonefish Grill, with locations in nearly 30 states, while not the fanciest place in every town, serves many [gluten-free dishes](#) if you're in the mood for fresh seafood.



4. Call the restaurant a day or hours ahead of your dining schedule.

Ask the maitre d' if they serve gluten-free options. In some restaurants, you don't have to explain your preferences in detail because they've dealt with gluten-free diners in the past. Or perhaps, they're already committed to providing patrons with gluten-free options.

Garlic Jim's Famous Gourmet Pizza, a western-based pizza chain, is a good example. According to their FAQ page, all of their restaurant chains take gluten cross-contamination seriously. Besides using [gluten-free flour](#), they use separate utensils and sauce containers. All of their staff members are trained in avoiding cross contamination too. Check out their [gluten-free menu](#).

Asking Questions at the Restaurant

Pressed for time to do your research? If you're already seated at the restaurant and you're still unsure about their gluten-free guarantee, here's how to navigate your way to gluten-free land with ease and finesse:

5. Ask the server or chef if they're serving gluten-free meals.

Some servers can assure diners that gluten is absent from your meal, but aren't really sure about how it's gluten-free because they're not the ones preparing the food in the kitchen. For this reason, it pays to talk to the manager or chef instead.

6. Inquire about cross-contamination issues.

A common scenario of getting glutened in a restaurant stems not from the ingredients themselves, but from cross-contamination.

Unless the restaurant has separate kitchens in preparing gluten and non-gluten food, cross contamination is more likely to occur. This is particularly true in busy restaurants where it could be a challenge to prepare special meals amidst the chaos of busy rush times.

Be very clear about how kitchen surfaces, pan, and utensils need to be as clean as possible. By and large, they should not have traces of non-gluten foods in them.

In their gluten-free menu posted online, restaurant chain B.J.'s Restaurant & Brewhouse encourages their gluten-free diners (menu) to emphasize their gluten allergy with servers and staff to prevent cross contamination. In restaurants where the staff is not as knowledgeable about the ill-effects of gluten, use the more familiar word allergies instead to describe your gluten intolerance.

7. If you're still unsure, avoid certain cuisines.



Certain types of food, like Japanese and Italian cuisines tend to have gluten in their normal ingredients, so it's best to avoid both. Most Italian restaurants have pizza and pasta as their main dishes, while Japanese dishes often have soy sauce in them, all of which typically do contain gluten by default.

Despite being Asian cuisine (and being notorious for soy sauce as an ingredient), Thai food is typically more forgiving than other cuisines because there are more choices when dishes are heavier on curries and other spices rather than soy. Mexican, Indian, and South American dishes are better options too because they're often made from corn and rice.



Sit Back and Enjoy Your Gluten-Free Meal!

Once you've done your research, it's easier to sit back and enjoy your gluten-free meal. Keep in mind, however, that regardless of how impressive the restaurant's gluten-free menu appears, you'll need to be more vigilant than someone who's dining without food intolerance by asking the right questions.

After your meal, thank the staff and tip well to show your appreciation. Think of a good tip as an investment in your future dining experience at the same restaurant. Do return to restaurants that work out for you to save the hassle of reinventing the wheel every time.