

Foods labeled gluten-free must now meet new standards

By ACSH Staff — August 7, 2014



About three million Americans less than one percent of the

population have celiac disease, an autoimmune digestive disorder in which the consumption of gluten destroys the lining of the small intestine, impairing the absorption of vitamins, minerals and calories. The only way to manage this disease is to consume a gluten-free diet. Those with celiac disease may now be able to rest a little easier, as [federal rules went](#) ^[1] into effect this week defining the criteria that a food must meet to be labeled gluten-free.

The new guidelines require that a food labeled gluten-free must contain less than 20 parts per million of gluten, a virtually undetectable amount. Those with celiac disease can often tolerate this small amount of gluten.

Not surprisingly, it is not only those with celiac disease who will be paying attention to these labels. According to a report released by the NPD Group, a market research firm that tracks eating trends, eleven percent of US households consume a gluten-free diet, and only 25 percent cite celiac disease as the reason. Further emphasizing the growing gluten-free trend, marketing research firm Packaged Facts estimates that sales of gluten-free food will be over \$6.6 billion by 2017, increasing from \$4.2 billion in 2012.

However, Dana Angelo White, a dietitian and clinical assistant professor at Quinnipiac University says, There is a common misconception that gluten-free diets are healthier or for weight loss. [Furthermore], people who are not afflicted with this condition put themselves unnecessarily at risk for nutrient deficiencies by banishing all gluten from their diet.

ACSH's Ariel Savransky adds, We discussed, not long ago, the [gluten-free craze](#) ^[2] and its lack of relationship to health benefits. The fact is that unless someone has a medical condition which requires them to consume a gluten-free diet, there is no proven health benefit to going gluten-free. The numbers cited by the NPD Group show that the majority of those choosing to go gluten-free do not do so for medical conditions. Educational efforts should strive to teach consumers about this way of eating so they can make the most informed decisions about their health.

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Links

[1] <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/08/05/gluten-free-labeling-rules-take-effect/13618741/>

[2] <http://acsh.org/2014/06/going-gluten-free-really-cracked-really/>