

# Innovative Device Eliminates Gluten-Free Guesswork



By Julianna LeMieux — May 5, 2016



For someone with celiac disease who cannot eat gluten,

dining outside of their own kitchen is, at best, stressful and potentially dangerous. That's because it's completely a guessing game.

It is impossible to tell if food contains gluten by looking at it, tasting it or smelling it. That leaves one at the mercy of the word of a dinner party host or restaurant waiter, creating situations that can turn an otherwise fun night out into a stressful situation.

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disorder that results in damage to the small intestine when gluten is ingested. It is estimated that 1 percent of the population has the disease, however many remain undiagnosed.

One of the complicating factors of celiac disease is that even trace amounts of gluten can cause harm. Therefore, the "cross contamination" that can easily occur in a kitchen which is making food both with, and without, gluten needs to be considered.

For example, an apple (gluten free) that is placed on a cutting board which previously had bread (not gluten free) on it cannot be eaten by someone with celiac disease. This cross contamination is very difficult to avoid and it requires staunch dedication to keep everything separate from surfaces to knives. Moreover, restaurants can label an item on the menu "gluten free" with no regulations or testing.

Therefore, even if intentions are good, food that is advertised as gluten free may actually not be gluten free enough.

But now, there's a solution to this problem that can literally change the lives of people with celiac disease. And saying that it's life-changing is not an overstatement, when you consider that nearly every place that serves food (restaurants, school cafeterias, ballparks or any friends' home) is potentially hazardous.

[Nima](#) <sup>[1]</sup>, developed by the company 6SensorLabs, can test food and drink for the presence of small amounts of gluten. It has been named one of *Time* magazine's "[Best Inventions of 2015](#)" <sup>[2]</sup>, and *Mashable.com* listed it as one of the "[11 most impressive social good innovations from April](#)." <sup>[3]</sup>



Image courtesy of  
nimasensor.com

It is small enough to be carried in a pocket (3.5 inches wide by 3.1 high), lightweight, works quickly (2 minutes) and is very easy to use. You simply remove a small portion of food or drink, place it into the device, and any gluten present in the food will be sensed by the replaceable cartridge located inside the Nima.

Additionally, the readout of the results is quite simple. If the food contains over 20 parts per million (ppm) of gluten, the Nima displays a frown-y face. If it contains less than 20 ppm, the Nima displays a smiley face (as shown in the above photo). That is simple enough for my 6-year old to understand, allowing him to be able to use the Nima at school or a birthday party with accuracy.

The 20 ppm is not an arbitrary number. In August 2013, the Food and Drug Administration ruled that a food must contain less than 20 ppm of gluten in order to be labeled "gluten free." To put that incredibly small amount of gluten into perspective, bread contains over 100,000 ppm of gluten.

There's only one aspect of Nima that produces a sizable frown-y face: It's expensive. It costs \$249 regularly (\$199 if pre-ordered). However, the device alone is not able to test food. You also need to buy the one-time-use-only capsules (a 12-pack costs \$59.95) that are at the heart of the gluten detection. In fact, the company has a subscription program based on your usage (the heaviest is 24 capsules/month for \$95.90). Depending on how much you are using it, that could become a major expense.

Cost aside, Nima is a game changer for people who live a gluten-free lifestyle. Taking away the guesswork and stress that goes with a gluten-free diet is a welcome advancement for anyone with celiac disease who would like to have a meal outside of their home without getting sick.

The Nima is currently on pre-order (which began last October), with an expected release date of "mid-2016," according to its website. The company is planning to release a similar device to test for the presence of peanuts and dairy in 2017.

---

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.acsh.org/news/2016/05/05/life-changing-device-ends-gluten-free-guesswork>

**Links**

[1] <https://nimasensor.com/#about>

[2] <http://time.com/4115398/best-inventions-2015/>

[3] <http://mashable.com/2016/05/03/social-good-innovations-april-2016/#r.fzdsAFtOqJ>