



## How to Win the Adoration of Gluten-Intolerant Conference-Goers

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### Everybody Eats!

People with medically diagnosed gluten intolerance, also known as celiac disease, make up 1% of the population. This adds up to about 3 million Americans.

Going gluten-free also has become popular recently among people who don't have a medical diagnosis but who feel better without wheat.

People who need to avoid gluten are like everyone else —they want tasty, fun, and comforting meals. But providing sustenance to gluten-free people can be a challenge for those in the hospitality industry and those who organize conferences and meetings. Finding foods without wheat, barley, oats, and mysteries such as “modified food starch” takes extra effort.

Once you learn a few tips, though, it's not hard to serve nutritious and satisfying fare. The world is full of non-wheat food.

If you help them out, travelers who need to follow a gluten-free diet will fall all over themselves to thank you.

Follow these simple rules and win showers of praise at your next event.

### Celiac.org says:

“**Celiac Disease (CD)** is a

lifelong inherited

autoimmune condition

affecting children and

adults. When people with

CD eat foods that contain

**gluten**, it creates an

immune-mediated toxic

reaction that causes

damage to the small

intestine and does not

allow food to be properly

absorbed. Even small

amounts of **gluten** in foods

can affect those with CD.

## **Rule #1 – Know Your Stuff**

It's important that chefs and commercial kitchen menu planners understand food ingredients and where foods "come from."

Know the basics, and read labels on food containers.

I have been served pretzels by a kitchen that should have known better. A kitchen manager in a chain restaurant once asked me if I could eat a tomato.

Basic knowledge of botany goes a long way: we're talking grass-like grains here. Ever see a bakery logo with a lovely ear of wheat or a bundle of wheat stalks? A tomato looks pretty darn different.

## **Rule #2 – Keep It Easy**

Often, a kitchen can simply omit a gluten-laden item from the diner's plate, or make an almost-the-same version for gluten-free diners at a buffet.

No bun, no bread, no sauce—no gluten. Voila.

Making a beautiful layered custard dessert for a crowd? To keep the gluten-free guests feeling part of the family, assemble the same dessert in a ramekin and omit the cake base layer. You're done! (Assuming your delicious custard is thickened without wheat-based flour, that is. Go starch-free or use corn starch or rice flour. They work!)

## **Rule #3 - Celiacs Cannot Live by Salad Alone**

Will your event feed a group for a full day or longer? If so, consider varying the overall menu for the event. A salad buffet is wonderful at lunch or dinner—but make sure the salad bar is not the main (or only) menu item for your gluten-free attendees for more than one meal per day. Persons may moo. Some people find too much raw food disrupts their digestion.

This leads us to:

## **Rule #4 - Carbohydrates Make People Happy**

Wheat-free carbs do exist! Zero in on rice, corn, quinoa, and potatoes.

- Our friend the noble potato is adaptable in many forms—a bag of chips ("crisps" across the pond) being an obvious alternative to the pretzel. Consider dedicating a separate fryer for gluten-free foods.

- To accompany cheese platters and dips, add a cracker choice in a gluten-free grain (and label them as gluten-free). Many options are now available.
- Corn chips and corn tortillas lend themselves to Mexican themes. Hurray for quesadillas, tamales, guacamole, and queso — as long as the cheese is “real,” non-processed cheese and the sauces or fillings are free of flour, food starch, or other iffy additives.
- Asian cuisine brings us rice, rice noodles, and rice paper spring rolls. (In Asian cooking for gluten-free diners, be sure to use wheat-free soy sauce, sometimes labeled as “tamari.” Read those labels!)
- Italy serves polenta (corn) and risotto (rice). Pasta? Yes! Gluten-free pasta is made from corn, rice, quinoa, and other grains — as fusilli, penne, lasagne, angel hair, and even tortellini and ravioli. Ambitious chefs might make their own gluten-free pastas.

Be aware that rice cakes are not created equal. The Lundberg family farms sustainably in California and scores points not only on the eco-scale but by making the best tasting rice cakes out there. Pair them with hummus or another Mediterranean dip and watch people dig in. Buy them bite-size for appetizers.

Avoid spelt and certain other unusual grains that are too closely related to wheat. See the [celiac.org](http://celiac.org) website for details.

Breakfasts are a special issue. Celiacs can feel excluded by tables laden with lots of lovely, wheat-y, pastry choices. Make friends by budgeting for gluten-free bagels. For a crowd, consider breakfast taquitos in soft corn tortillas, a crustless quiche (or use a gluten-free crust), or a gluten-free waffle station. Or, whip up some gluten-free muffins or coffee cake. Baking mixes are available from companies such as Bob’s Red Mill and Pamela’s Products. People will swoon.

## **Rule #5 - Let Us Eat Cake (Or at Least Cookies)**

A display of cakes and petit-fours and torten and éclairs is a beautiful thing—except when it’s all off-limits for dietary reasons. If the event budget permits it, please take pity.

- Naturally gluten-free desserts include no-crust cheesecake, custards, fruit, and ice cream. But be sure to read the ingredients list for any prepared foods, sauces, or mixes.
- Chocolate is gluten-free, as long as certain added flavorings are absent, the main culprit being malt.
- Consider baking cakes, bars, or cookies. Flourless chocolate cakes are popular and downright decadent.

## Conclusion—Surviving and Thriving On the Road

Each year, more people are being diagnosed with celiac disease, or choosing a gluten-free diet on their own. Their adjustment to a new and limited diet can be tricky.

More and more prepared gluten-free foods are in the marketplace, making life easier for people who need to avoid wheat and related grains. But we can't stay tied to our kitchens. When traveling, there's nothing nicer than knowing someone is looking out for our food needs. We so appreciate an understanding wait staff, specially prepared gluten-free menus, and a kitchen and chef who care.

You can be ahead of the curve on understanding our dietary needs. Let us thank you profusely at your next event!

## For More Information

- The Celiac Disease Foundation — <http://celiac.org>
- Gluten Intolerance Group — <http://www.gluten.net>  
(Provides information for restaurants and food service, including an accreditation program.)
- USA Today/MediaPlanet supplement on Celiac Disease, May 2010 — [http://somvweb.som.umd.edu/absolutenm/articlefiles/1157-Celiac%20Disease\\_May2010\\_USAT.pdf](http://somvweb.som.umd.edu/absolutenm/articlefiles/1157-Celiac%20Disease_May2010_USAT.pdf)  
(File includes large graphics – wait an extra few moments for downloading.)

## Food Sources

- Bob's Red Mill — <http://www.bobsredmill.com>
- Lundberg Family Farms — <http://www.lundberg.com>  
(Superior rice cakes, also pasta and other products. Eco-friendly, too.)
- Pamela's Products — <http://www.pamelasproducts.com>  
(Excellent baking mixes, also packaged cookies and more)
- Gluten Free Pantry — <http://www.glutenfree.com>  
(A world of gluten-free foods)