



Gluten
FREE

FACT SHEET:

Coeliac disease and diabetes

Coeliac disease and type 1 diabetes can occur together because they are both autoimmune conditions. It is estimated that 5 out of 100 of people with type 1 diabetes may have coeliac disease. Some people with type 2 diabetes also develop coeliac disease, but the two conditions are not related.

What is coeliac disease?

Coeliac disease is a condition where an intolerance to gluten causes inflammation and damage to the small bowel.

What are the symptoms of coeliac disease?

The symptoms of coeliac disease can vary from person to person. Symptoms may include one or more of the following:

- diarrhoea and/or constipation
- weight loss
- flatulence
- fatigue
- abdominal bloating and cramping
- anaemia or low iron levels
- fluctuating blood glucose levels.

How is coeliac disease diagnosed?

A blood test is used to screen for coeliac disease. This test measures antibody levels in your blood. If the blood test is positive, this needs to be followed by a small bowel biopsy to confirm the diagnosis.

Wait until your diagnosis is confirmed before you start on a gluten-free (GF) diet. This is important to make sure the diagnosis is accurate. Avoiding gluten before you have the tests could influence the results and mask the diagnosis.

People with type 1 diabetes may have coeliac disease without any symptoms. So, screening is important to detect this condition. Ask your diabetes health professional for more information.

How is coeliac disease treated?

The only treatment for coeliac disease is a lifelong GF diet.

Which foods contain gluten?

Gluten is a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and oats. Once you are diagnosed with coeliac disease, you must avoid these grains. You must also avoid food or drinks that contain ingredients from these grains. It is important that you remove all traces of gluten from your diet.

The Australian food standard requires that any ingredient in a product that comes from a grain that contains gluten is declared on the food packaging.

What happens if I do not follow a GF diet?

If coeliac disease is left untreated, you have an increased risk of developing other medical problems. Even very small amounts can cause ongoing damage to the bowel wall. Damage to your intestine can occur even if you are eating gluten and not experiencing symptoms. This can lead to your body not being able to properly absorb essential nutrients from food.

The condition can affect other parts of the body too. It increases the risk of infertility, osteoporosis (also known as brittle bones) and some cancers.

Untreated coeliac disease can also make it difficult for people with diabetes to manage their blood glucose levels.

Healthy eating for coeliac disease and diabetes

If you have coeliac disease and diabetes, healthy eating includes:

- regular meals containing GF carbohydrates (carbs)
- low glycemic index (GI) carb foods
- foods rich in calcium and iron
- high-fibre food choices and plenty of fruit and vegetables.

If you have been diagnosed with coeliac disease, it is recommended that you see a dietitian with experience in managing coeliac disease and diabetes. They can help develop a healthy eating plan that is right for you.

GF carb foods

Healthy eating for diabetes includes choosing the right type and amount of carb foods. Many commonly eaten carb foods such as breads, cereals, pasta, biscuits and crackers contain gluten. So, you will need to avoid these. Look for GF carb alternatives.

The foods listed below are GF carbs. Those in **bold** have a lower GI. This means they raise blood glucose levels more slowly. Including low-GI foods as part of a healthy eating plan can help manage your blood glucose levels.



Carbs	Example
GF bread	Made from gluten-free grains including rice, buckwheat, corn, potato and/or soy. Includes GF pizza bases, GF corn tortillas, GF pancakes and GF muffins
GF breakfast cereals	Cereals made from gluten-free grains such as GF rice flakes, GF cornflakes, GF muesli, rice bran , puffed rice, millet and corn, rice porridge, buckwheat porridge, lupin flakes
Rice	Basmati (white or brown), Doongara™ (SunRice® Clever Rice or SunRice® Low-GI Brown Rice) , white rice, arborio rice, brown rice, jasmine rice
Legumes*	Kidney beans, chick peas, lentils, three-bean mix, butter beans , chick pea flours, lupin flours and flakes, GF baked beans
Fruit	All types of fruit, such as apples, oranges, peaches , bananas and melons
GF crispbread	Corn thins, rice cakes, corn cakes, GF crackers made from rice, corn, buckwheat or quinoa
Dairy products and alternatives*	Milk, GF calcium fortified soy milk, GF custard, GF yoghurt and GF ice cream
Vegetables containing carb	Potatoes, sweet potato, sweet corn, taro, yam, Carisma™ potato
GF pasta	Corn pasta, rice pasta, rice vermicelli, rice noodles, bean thread (mungbean) noodles, buckwheat soba noodles, lentil or chickpea pasta
GF grains	Quinoa, buckwheat , polenta and amaranth, millet, sorghum, teff

*Always check the ingredient list to make sure the product is GF.

Note: Some varieties of these foods may come in low-GI versions.



More information and support

- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) to access our Carb Counting program online and other NDSS programs and services in your state or territory, or online.
- Go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) and search for the 'Glycemic index', 'Understanding food labels', 'Carbohydrate counting' and other fact sheets.
- Call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700** and ask to speak to a dietitian.
- Go to [dietitiansaustralia.org.au](https://www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au) or call Dietitians Australia on **1800 812 942** to find a dietitian near you.
- For more information about coeliac disease, go to [coeliac.org.au](https://www.coeliac.org.au) or call Coeliac Australia on **1300 GLUTEN (1300 458 836)**.
- For more information on glycemic index visit [glycemicindex.com](https://www.glycemicindex.com) or [gisymbol.com](https://www.gisymbol.com).



Top tips

- People with type 1 diabetes may have coeliac disease without any symptoms. So, screening is important to detect this condition. Ask your diabetes health professional for more information.
- The only treatment for coeliac disease is a lifelong GF diet.
- See a dietitian with experience in managing coeliac disease and diabetes. A dietitian can help you develop a healthy eating plan that is right for you.

Notes

The NDSS and you

Whether you have just been diagnosed with diabetes, or have been living with diabetes for a while, the NDSS provides a range of support services, information, and subsidised products to help you manage your diabetes, stay healthy and live well. For access to more resources (including translated versions), or to find out more about support services, go to [ndss.com.au](https://www.ndss.com.au) or call the NDSS Helpline on **1800 637 700**.

This information is intended as a guide only. It should not replace individual medical advice and if you have any concerns about your health or further questions, you should contact your health professional.