



# Gluten Cross Contamination and You

If you have been diagnosed with celiac disease or gluten sensitivities, you are probably very careful about what you eat. Since the primary treatment for gluten sensitivity is diet change, you probably know quite a bit about gluten-free diets and sources of gluten.

Unfortunately, even the most cautious eaters can continue to show symptoms of gluten exposure. This is because preparation and cross-contamination can transform safe, gluten-free items into unsafe, symptom-inducing meals.

## What is Gluten Cross Contamination?

Coeliac.org defines cross-contamination as "when a gluten-free food item becomes contaminated by either direct or indirect contact with a gluten-containing food item." Any gluten-free product exposed to a non-gluten-free food or ingredient is considered cross-contaminated, rendering it unsafe for consumption by those with gluten sensitivities.

Cross-contamination most often happens in kitchens during food preparation. It may happen from physical food-to-food contact. Cross-contamination also occurs when a tool is used on a gluten-free product after being used on one with gluten! For example, cross-contamination does happen when you butter regular bread with a knife then use the same knife on gluten-free bread.

Cross-contamination can also occur before food preparation. If items are processed or manufactured, this can quickly happen in factories or on production lines. Produce items are also at risk, as they may come into gluten-containing items on farms. For example, a vegetable might be grown next to a wheat field or harvested with the same machine as the barley grown in another area of the farm.

Any food that is shipped or stored may be cross-contaminated during those times. A gluten-free item may be packed next to a regular bread loaf in the truck that delivers to the grocery store. An ordinarily safe fruit may sit next to pasta in the stockroom. Be aware that this exposure might be enough to cross-contaminate gluten-free items.

# How Do I Avoid Gluten Cross Contamination?

⤵ It is nearly impossible to avoid gluten cross-contamination entirely since you cannot know everywhere a food has been before coming to you. There are, however, many steps that you can take to help you lessen the chances of cross-contamination in buying, storage, and preparation practices.

⤵ When buying gluten-free foods, it will help to identify brands and stores that you trust. Do your research into food manufacturers – they might share information about the precautions they take to keep your food free of gluten. While stores are hard to gauge, you can typically trust those with designated gluten-free areas more.

⤵ If you are shopping for someone with gluten sensitivity, take an extra second to consider the safety of the items you're buying. If you see a gluten-free item next to a wheat-based product on store shelves or stocking carts, do not bring that item home with you. Never buy unpacked food items from bins or items like candy that require a scoop for serving. Containers and scoops at stores may not always be adequately cleaned between storing gluten-containing and gluten-free foods

⤵ Your cart is another danger zone for cross-contamination! Wipe it down well before use in case of the person before you placed gluten-containing items in it. As you fill your cart, be sure that you keep any items containing gluten as far away as possible from your gluten-free items. Be sure to continue this practice during checkout and while placing groceries into your car.



⤵ When storing food at home, designate areas for gluten-free foods. Having a separate cabinet or drawer will prevent family members or roommates from accidentally contaminating safe items by storing gluten-containing items nearby.

⤵ Food preparation is a huge source of cross-contamination. Beware of every surface, tool, and spice. The items we use to flavor foods, like seasonings, often contain gluten – so avoid using them unless you are sure they don't. In addition, appliances and utensils can contaminate foods.

⤵ Always avoid wooden spoons, spatulas, and cutting boards – where residual gluten and bacteria can linger through washes. If a shared grilling surface is used to prepare gluten-free food, it should first be covered to avoid direct grill-to-food contact.

⤵ Have separate toasters, toaster ovens, and waffle makers for gluten-free varieties. In some cases, cleaning these items between uses is not enough to eliminate gluten, leading to cross-contamination. If you cannot buy a second toaster, consider buying toaster-safe bags for additional protection.

⤵ Another food preparation problem area is your colander or strainer. These often cross-contaminate gluten-free food items, so consider buying a second one in a different color for use with only gluten-free items!

⤵ Think before you double-dip. Food containers often become contaminated by utensils that have touched gluten-containing items. If you spread peanut butter on bread, stick the knife back into the jar to get more peanut butter... that jar is now contaminated. This commonly happens with community condiments.

④ To avoid cross-contamination via butter dish or cream cheese container, buy two and label the one that cannot come into contact with gluten. If possible, avoid this chance altogether by buying squeezable condiments instead of jars.

④ Serving food requires caution as well. Do not use the same serving utensil across multiple dishes, and keep gluten-free options in their area. Never let gluten-free dishes be part of a buffet containing gluten-containing options, as guests may not know the level of caution needed and are likely to cross-contaminate.

④ Family members and roommates of gluten-sensitive individuals must understand the importance of proper food handling. They should be aware that the consequences of gluten consumption are real and unpleasant and be well-versed in what is required to avoid cross-contamination.

④ While you cannot know everything, you can carefully monitor your diet and practice caution when buying, storing, and preparing food. Knowing what gluten cross-contamination is and identifying where and when it can happen is key to avoiding accidental exposure along with all of its unpleasant side effects. To combat cross-contamination in your diet, do your research and stay aware!

