

Thinking about Gluten-free Offerings? May is Celiac Disease Awareness Month



There is a lot of conversation in the foodservice community about the feasibility of offering gluten-free (GF) items for customers with celiac disease, other types of gluten-intolerance and for those who eat gluten-free as a dietary choice without a disease component. Approximately 3 million people in the United States have celiac disease plus an indeterminate number follow a gluten-free diet for other reasons.

National Celiac Awareness Month raises awareness about sensitivity to gluten. What should you know? Celiac disease is an autoimmune disease that damages the small intestine, the portion of the gut that digests and absorbs nutrients from food. This type of damage can limit nutrient absorption from food. Celiac disease can affect people in many different ways. Symptoms can vary along a spectrum from mild bloating and indigestion to more adverse reactions such as severe stomach cramps, diarrhea and muscle spasms. Lack of diagnosis and/or continued consumption of gluten for those with celiac disease can produce different body symptoms, not just digestion.

Treatment for celiac disease and gluten intolerance is straightforward - avoid foods which contain gluten. Gluten is a protein found in barley, wheat and rye. Unlike an allergic reaction, which can be deadly for those with allergies, consuming gluten for the celiac patient can bring on a bout of symptoms.

Thinking about adding gluten-free items to your menu? Where do you start? Evaluate your operation for feasibility of offering GF safely. Not all food service providers may be capable of producing food that is completely safe for those who must avoid even the smallest amounts of gluten.

Even with the utmost care, if any gluten-containing foods are found in a kitchen, there remains the possibility of trace amounts of gluten being transferred into a GF food.

Think about just a few areas of concern in developing a plan:

- A special ordering system must be put into place to monitor GF orders
- You must work with your vendors
- Each prep station must be evaluated for potential cross-contact with gluten
- Pots, pans and utensils must be thoroughly cleaned before being used in preparing a GF meal
- You cannot use the same water used to cook regular pasta to cook gluten-free pasta
- Separate deep fat fryers must be used for GF products and should be placed away from fryers used for cooking gluten-containing items due to splatter (heat does not destroy gluten!)
- Gluten can become airborne when working with wheat flour and contaminate GF food and prep areas
- Food-service workers must wash hands and put on clean gloves when working with GF foods
- Training, training, training to do it all right

For more information, check out these links:

www.celiaccentral.org/awarenessmonth/

www.americanceeliac.org

www.fastcasual.com/blog/10165/What-every-restaurant-should-know-about-going-gluten-free-Infographic