

PENNY SAVER NEWS

January 22, 2015

BY: Mary A. Keith, PhD, LD
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

Gluten-Free Labels – What's Included, What's Not

The new gluten-free label rule has been in effect since August, so you might have noticed changes by now. Gluten-free diets are still certainly popular. And FDA made the rule official in August for any food they regulate. If the label claims that the food is gluten-free it must have less than 20 parts per million gluten. That amount is the least that can be accurately measured. And it is so little that very, very few people would ever have a reaction to it. Sounds pretty simple, right?

But as you might guess, when it comes to rules, there are exceptions. If you or a loved one is forced to eat gluten-free, you need to understand some of these as well. In the first place, the actual rules only apply to foods that FDA regulates. Granted, that is most of them. But meats, poultry and eggs are regulated by USDA. Alcoholic drinks (yes, they are food) are regulated by the Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau. And although FDA regulates them, the gluten-free rule does not apply to cosmetics.

USDA has said that if a meat-containing food claims to be gluten-free it should meet the FDA standards. What meats might have gluten in them? Think about all the hot dogs, lunch meats, chicken patties, or dishes such as frozen chicken pot pies or Salisbury steaks! Every one of them could have wheat as an ingredient.

The Tax Bureau also says that it will follow FDA's rules for alcohol. If something is made strictly from corn for example it could put gluten-free on the label. But for any alcohols made with wheat, rye or barley, the manufacturer would have to prove that there is no gluten left after the fermentation. And if they think that all the gluten has been destroyed by the fermentation they could say on the label that it was treated to remove the gluten but would have to add "The gluten content of this product cannot be verified, and this product may contain gluten." Read labels, and make smart choices!

On top of these exceptions, it is possible that something could contain wheat starch for example, but no gluten (a protein). If the starch was purified and then used to make glucose syrup, there would be no gluten even though the food contains wheat. As long as there is less than 20 ppm

of gluten, they could call it gluten-free. But they would have to add a statement saying that the ingredients were processed to remove it.

Yet another exception is grass – wheat grass, rye grass or barley grass. These grasses and grass juices that some people consume can be labeled gluten-free. There is very little gluten in such young plants. Still the company that puts labels on them has to verify that there are less than 20 ppm in a serving. And FDA has said which tests it will accept if someone makes that claim. They have to be able to prove it!

A final concern is how reliable the labels will be. FDA does enforce their label rules. Several studies have tested foods to see if they really are as gluten-free as the labels claimed. So far the results are pretty good: over 95% of them passed! Your first call, if you question a label, should be to the food manufacturer. Ask them how the food is made and if they tested to be sure there's no gluten.

Still, if you see a label you think is not true, you can report it to the FDA. Call them at 866-337-6272 (the Florida office). If you think you got sick from a food that claimed to be gluten free you can report it to the Adverse Event Reporting System at 240-402-2405. Just remember to read labels carefully, because wheat can be in all kinds of food where you might never expect it!

Here's a Mexican stew with canned ingredients, and no gluten. It will give you plenty of flavor while saving you hours of time. Hominy is white corn treated with lye to swell the grains. Serve with corn tortillas and steamed vegetables or a salad.

Quick Pozole

2 lbs lean beef or boneless chicken	1 Tbsp vegetable oil
1 large onion, chopped	1 clove garlic, minced
¼ cup fresh cilantro, chopped	1 15-oz can stewed tomatoes
4 Tbsp tomato paste	1 29-oz can hominy
Salt, pepper to taste	hot sauce to taste if desired

Cut the meat into small cubes. Heat oil in large pot, add meat and sauté lightly. Add onion, garlic, cilantro, salt and pepper and enough water to cover meat. Stir, cover, and bring to boiling. Reduce heat and simmer until meat is tender. Stir in stewed and paste tomatoes. Simmer 20 minutes longer. Add hominy and cook 15 minutes more. Add water if soup is too thick. Adjust seasonings and serve. Serves 8.

Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) is an Equal Employment Opportunity Institution authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function with non-discrimination with respect to race, creed, color, religion, age, disability, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, national origin, political opinions or affiliations. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Cooperative Extension Service, University of Florida, IFAS, Florida A. & M., University Cooperative Extension Program, and Boards of County Commissioners Cooperating.