

Guidelines on the prescribing of gluten-free products within primary care on NHS prescriptions

Background

NHS Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) has a legal responsibility to provide comprehensive, effective and accessible health services to its populations within a finite resource, which includes the provision of prescribed foods for patients who require special diets.

Coeliac disease is a common life-long condition with a prevalence of about 1% in Europe (Coeliac UK, 2004). The cornerstone of treatment is a gluten-free diet and patients require regular support from a registered dietician.

- Coeliac disease is an inflammatory condition of the small intestinal mucosa that is induced by the ingestion of gluten and which improves clinically and histologically when gluten is excluded from the diet (British Society of Gastroenterology, 2010)
- In untreated coeliac disease, damage to the surface of the small intestine results in reduced ability to digest and absorb food and causes malabsorption of essential nutrients such as iron, folic acid and calcium. This can lead to a variety of health problems including diarrhoea, anaemia, reduced appetite, weight loss, mouth ulcers, abdominal bloating / distension and faltering growth in childhood (Coeliac UK, 2004).
- Coeliac disease is unique among gastrointestinal disorders in the availability of an effective dietary treatment that will restore almost all patients to full health, and help to protect against the development of complications (Coeliac UK, 2004).
- Coeliac disease requires life-long exclusion of gluten from the diet and dietary compliance is essential to successful management. However, some patients with coeliac disease may require with other dietary exclusions in addition to gluten-free, e.g. wheat and lactose.

Purpose

The purpose of this guidance is to support the standardisation of prescribing of gluten-free foods in primary care in accordance with the outcomes of the Department of Health (DoH) 2018 Gluten Free Consultation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gluten-free-foods-on-nhs-prescription>)

Scope

All GP practices in the Medway are expected to incorporate this guideline into their practice procedures and the Medicines Optimisation team will monitor practice performance in line with this guidance on a quarterly basis. GP practices are expected to review their prescribing to keep within this guideline. The Medicines Optimisation team is responsible for supporting the implementation of this guidance across Medway.

Procedure

Presentation to Prescription – The Patient Process

Patients with a diagnosis of coeliac disease will be managed by a multi-disciplinary team across both primary and secondary care including GP, practice nurse, gastroenterologist / paediatric gastroenterologist, registered dietician (adult / paediatrics) and pharmacist. All

patients receiving prescriptions for gluten-free foods should have had a **Confirmed** diagnosis from a Gastroenterologist / Paediatric Gastroenterologist.

Any gluten-free foods being prescribed for patients without a confirmed diagnosis should be stopped.

People with coeliac disease should avoid all foods containing gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye and barley. NB Sensitivity to oats varies between individual adults – advice on inclusion or exclusion should be sought from the patient’s registered dietician; oats should always be excluded from the diets of children diagnosed with coeliac disease.

A gluten-free diet requires the avoidance of any food made from ingredients containing gluten such as bread, flour, pasta, cakes, pastries and biscuits. There are many other foods including ready meals and manufactured meat products such as sausages which can often contain gluten, e.g. cereals used as fillers.

People with coeliac disease obtain gluten-free foods from a variety of sources including GP (FP10 prescription), supermarket, health food shop, pharmacy and mail order / telephone / internet.

Changes to the prescribing of gluten-free foods on NHS prescriptions

In 2018 the DoH conducted a consultation on the prescribing of gluten free products and the outcomes are summarised below:

The current GF food list contains items that will no longer be prescribed and a large number of bread types and mixes. As of January 2018 there were 95 bread products included in the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS) recommended list (replicated in Part XV of the Drug Tariff). These products include; loaves of white and brown bread, sliced and unsliced bread, fibre loaf, seeded loaf, bread rolls, baguettes, part baked rolls, and pizza bases.

The changes to GF food prescribing (by category) is summarised in Table 1 (below). A range of GF bread and GF mixes will be retained to allow patient choice

Table 1:
Effective as of December 2018

| Food Type/Category | Drug Tariff – Number of Item Types | Implementation |
|---|---|--|
| GF, GF & Wheat Free (WF) Biscuits (includes crispbreads and crackers) | 25 products | Will no longer be available. All items to be removed from the Drug Tariff (Part XV). |
| GF, GF & WF Bread (includes rolls, part baked bread, and pizza bases) | 95 products | To retain provision; ACBS review of GF bread against agreed definition |
| GF, GF & WF Cakes/Pastries | No ACBS approved products | Will not be available |

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|---|---------------------------|--|
| GF WF Cereals | 9 products | Will no longer be available. All items to be removed from the Drug Tariff (Part XV). |
| GF WF Cooking Aids | 2 products | Will no longer be available. All items to be removed from the Drug Tariff (Part XV). |
| GF, GF & WF Grains/Flours | 12 products | Will no longer be available. All items to be removed from the Drug Tariff (Part XV). |
| GF, GF & WF Mixes | 29 products | To retain provision; ACBS review of GF bread against agreed definition |
| GF, GF & WF Pasta (includes fusilli, lasagne, macaroni and spaghetti) | 23 products | Will no longer be available. All items to be removed from the Drug Tariff (Part XV) |
| GF, GF & WF Ready meals | No ACBS approved products | Will not be available |

Recommended products

| For England - Gluten-free Bread and Mixes | Pack size | Units | PIP code |
|--|--------------------|-------|----------|
| Bread | | | |
| Glutafin gluten-free fibre loaf sliced | 300g | 0.75 | 237-7356 |
| Glutafin gluten-free high fibre loaf sliced | 350g | 1 | 401-4296 |
| Glutafin gluten-free Select fibre loaf sliced | 8 x 400g | 8 | 054-6101 |
| Glutafin gluten-free Select fresh brown loaf sliced | 8 x 400g | 8 | 330-6800 |
| Glutafin gluten-free Select fresh seeded loaf sliced | 8 x 400g | 8 | 402-3685 |
| Glutafin gluten-free Select fresh white loaf sliced | 8 x 400g | 8 | 290-6840 |
| Glutafin gluten-free Select seeded loaf sliced | 8 x 400g | 8 | 308-9364 |
| Glutafin gluten-free Select white loaf sliced | 8 x 400g | 8 | 054-6093 |
| Glutafin gluten-free white loaf sliced | 300g | 0.75 | 090-4268 |
| Rolls + Baguettes | | | |
| Glutafin gluten-free 4 white rolls | 200g (4 rolls) | 0.5 | 344-3645 |
| Glutafin gluten-free baguettes | 350g (2 Baguettes) | 1 | 224-0117 |
| Glutafin gluten-free part-baked 2 long white rolls | 150g (2 rolls) | 0.5 | 344-3637 |
| Glutafin gluten-free part-baked 4 fibre rolls | 200g (4 rolls) | 0.5 | 344-3652 |
| Glutafin gluten-free part-baked 4 white rolls | 200g (4 rolls) | 0.5 | 344-2753 |
| Flour Mix | | | |
| Glutafin gluten-free bread mix | 500g | 2 | 298-8418 |
| Glutafin gluten-free fibre bread mix | 500g | 2 | 298-8426 |
| Glutafin gluten-free multipurpose white mix | 500g | 2 | 231-2981 |
| Glutafin gluten-free Select bread mix | 500g | 2 | 274-4951 |
| Glutafin gluten-free Select fibre bread mix | 500g | 2 | 297-9912 |

| | | | |
|--|------|---|----------|
| Glutafin gluten-free Select multipurpose fibre mix | 500g | 2 | 004-5591 |
| Glutafin gluten-free Select multipurpose white mix | 500g | 2 | 004-5187 |
| Glutafin gluten-free wheat-free fibre mix | 500g | 2 | 231-2973 |

Quantities

Table 2 provides guidance on the monthly amount of prescribable gluten-free food, calculated in units based on energy and nutrient requirements of different age groups and genders. Additional amounts have been added for breastfeeding and the third trimester of pregnancy. This guidance is based on national nutritional recommendations and makes assumptions that in addition to gluten-free food on prescription, individuals eat naturally gluten-free carbohydrate food such as rice and potatoes.

Prescribing should be for a maximum of one month at a time

Table 2:

| Age and sex | Number of units (per month) |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| child 1-3 years | 10 |
| child 4-6 years | 11 |
| child 7-10 years | 13 |
| child 11-14 years | 15 |
| child 15-18 years | 18 |
| male 19-59 years | 18 |
| male 60-74 years | 16 |
| male 75+ years | 14 |
| female 19-74 years | 14 |
| female 75+ years | 12 |
| breastfeeding | add 4 |
| 3rd trimester pregnancy | add 1 |

A person's need for food often changes over time, and they may wish to try new items – it is recommended to switch like for like products on their repeat medication list.

Large quantities of gluten-free foods should not be prescribed as many products are difficult to store and expiry dates vary causing excessive wastage.

References:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gluten-free-foods-on-nhs-prescription>

<https://www.coeliac.org.uk/>

<https://www.prescqipp.info/>

Appendix 1 - Sample Letter to patients

Dear

We are writing to you in relation to the recent Department of Health changes with regards to the prescribing of gluten free items. As of the 1st of December 2018 there will be significant changes to what GPs across the country can prescribe.

The current NHS system for providing gluten-free products was introduced in the late 1960s, at a time when there was often no other way to obtain them. In the past few years the range and price of gluten free products available in supermarkets has improved dramatically. The Coeliac website (<https://www.coeliac.org.uk/>) has lots of recipe ideas and lifestyle advice as well as lots of other useful information.

The outcome of a national consultation by the Department of Health was to retain a limited range of bread and mixes on prescription. This means that other gluten free foods e.g. pasta, pizza bases, cereals, grains, flour and biscuits etc., will no longer be available to be prescribed. NHS Medway Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) will change the guidance regarding the supply of gluten-free products to this effect from 1 December in line with national changes. We recognise that some specialist gluten-free products, like bread and bread mixes, do still cost more, so our aim is to help you keep your weekly food bills broadly in line with the average. There are various alternative foods which are naturally gluten free, such as potatoes, rice and some noodles.

More detailed information on the outcome of the consultation is available by visiting <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/availability-of-gluten-free-foods-on-nhs-prescription>

Frequently asked questions

Why are you prescribing only bread and mixes?

The outcome of a national consultation by the Department of Health was to retain a limited range of bread and mixes on prescription. This means that other gluten free foods e.g. pasta, pizza bases, cereals, grains, flour and biscuits etc., will no longer be prescribed.

Why are only some brands of bread and mixes included?

To ensure that the gluten free products that remain available on prescription will be cost effective for prescribing through the NHS and provide appropriate patients with basic provisions to support a gluten free diet.

Will fresh bread be included?

Yes - many people prefer fresh bread and many gluten free suppliers have now removed the substantial surcharges that were associated with fresh bread. Where fresh GF bread is prescribed, it is advised to freeze surplus quantities immediately upon receipt as fresh GF bread deteriorates rapidly if stored at room temperature.

Why can't I get my gluten free products from the supermarket on prescription?

It would be nice if we could do this – unfortunately the way the NHS works means that only pharmacies or dispensing doctors' practices are able to dispense NHS prescriptions.

Why are you no longer funding biscuits, cakes, etc.?

Biscuits and cakes are not considered part of a healthy diet and for the practice and the NHS as a whole to prescribe these would be at odds with national health messages. For more information and advice on a healthy eating contact your local pharmacy, surgery or find out more from NHS Choices www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/

Why are you not funding pizza bases and pasta on NHS prescription anymore?

The outcome of the consultation was to retain a limited range of bread and mixes only on prescription. There are various naturally gluten free foods that can be eaten in place of pasta, such as potatoes, rice, rice noodles etc. Gluten free pizza bases and pasta are available from supermarkets at a reasonable cost and are similarly priced to the equivalent gluten containing products.

Are you reducing Units?

No, units are remaining the same as the current local guidelines as recommended by Coeliac UK.

Cost of gluten free products to the NHS

Gluten free products on prescription cost more than gluten free products in the supermarket. It is unclear why the NHS is charged so much for gluten free products. There is no obvious reason as to why these items prescribed on the NHS cost more than double the supermarket price of similar items.

Why have you focused on gluten-free foods? Are there no other ways in which the NHS could save money?

The NHS is constantly looking for ways to save money without impact on patient care. This means that the NHS has to look for ways of doing things differently and every little helps. The basis of this policy is not to penalise those who suffer from coeliac disease, but to provide some support towards the increased cost of maintaining a gluten free diet to an extent that the average weekly food bill would be similar to that of the rest of the population.

Patients with coeliac disease are not alone - there are frequently restrictions on the range of items that can be supplied on the NHS on prescription. Examples include over the counter items for self-limiting and minor conditions (e.g. sun creams, dandruff shampoo) the provision of a synthetic wig (but not a real-hair wig), dentures, crowns and bridges (but not dental implants), basic spectacle frames (but not necessarily fashionable ones).

Kind Regards

****Practice Information****