

Prescribing...

Gluten free products

- Coeliac UK has recently reviewed its guidelines on the type and quantities of gluten free foods suitable for prescribing.
- It supports the prescribing of **reasonable quantities** of essential staple food such as breads, bread and flour mix pasta and crisp breads.
- Mindful of healthy eating guidelines, it now advises that cakes, cake mixes and sweet biscuits should **not be prescribed routinely**.
- A recent HSSD Dietetic Department audit found that our patients with coeliac disease are more likely to be above their ideal weight than below it.
- Funds spent on these non-essential items, and other treatments not recommended by respected organisations, will not be available to fund recommended treatments highly likely to help our patients live longer and better lives.

Background

People with confirmed diagnoses of three gluten sensitive enteropathies (coeliac disease, dermatitis herpetiformis and steatorrhoea due to gluten intolerance) must avoid all food which contain gluten, a product found in wheat, rye and barley. Patients with confirmed coeliac disease who do not adhere to a gluten free diet for life may develop complications such as poor growth, osteoporosis (due to chronic malabsorption of calcium), lymphoma and infertility problems. Gluten free products should only be prescribed for patients with a confirmed diagnosis of these conditions, to promote compliance to a restricted diet and to ensure that patients' nutritional requirements are met.

Gluten free products should not be prescribed for any other condition such as Irritable Bowel Syndrome or Wheat Intolerance. Gluten-free products are not wheat free.

What products are available locally and at what cost?

The range of products available to islanders is listed in Part XV of the UK Drug Tariff. Products not listed in the Drug Tariff should not be prescribed on States prescriptions as they will be returned unpaid by the UK pricing authorities to our community pharmacists.

In the year ending August 2011, prescribing of all gluten-free products cost £110,316 in the Bailiwick. This figure excludes associated costs such as consultation grants to GPs, dispensing fees and carriage costs.

What is the latest advice on prescribing?

Coeliac UK supports the prescribing of essential food staples such as **bread, rolls, baguettes, bread mix, flour mix, pastry mix, pasta, pizza bases, crackers and crisp bread**, up to a maximum level, shown overleaf. Patients should be encouraged to have a healthy, well balanced diet through the consumption of naturally gluten-free foods such as vegetables, fruit, potatoes, rice, corn and some breakfast cereals which will also contribute to energy requirements. Any products including oat cereals used should be certified as being gluten-free since cross contamination is common. More information on a gluten free diet is available from Coeliac UK and the PEH Dietitians.

Gluten free products have been allocated a unit value based on their carbohydrate and energy content. One unit is 2 x 110-180g pizza bases, 400g of bread, 400g of rolls or bread, 200g of crackers/ crispbreads and 250g of pasta.

Age and Sex	Maximum number of units recommended by Coeliac UK per month
1 - 3 years	10
4 - 6 years	11
7 - 10 years	13
11-14 years	15
15-18 years	18
Male aged 19-59 years	18
Male aged 60-74 years	16
Male aged over 75 years	14
Female aged 19 - 74 years	14
Female aged over 75 years	12
Breastfeeding	Add 4 units
Third trimester of pregnancy	Add 1 unit
High physical activity	Add 4 units

Coeliac UK recommends that cakes, cake mixes and sweet biscuits should not be prescribed routinely. They advise that patients requesting these items be advised to buy them from supermarkets and other retail outlets. There is a wider range of products and food choices available to buy that available on prescription. It is also usually much cheaper to bake gluten free cakes and biscuits from mixes at home rather than to buy them ready-prepared.

So what?

With all of the present concerns about increasing rates of obesity, it is important to bear in mind this guidance from the Coeliac Society. It would be reasonable for doctors to

- ✚ Only prescribe essential items in moderate quantities for all newly-diagnosed coeliac patients.
- ✚ Review patients already receiving excessive quantities and/or non-essential items
- ✚ Stop prescribing non-essential gluten free products such as cakes and biscuits for the overwhelming majority of patients, especially those who are over their ideal body weight.

**The Contents of this bulletin were approved by Myfanwy Datta, MCN, SRD
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If you have any comments or observations on the contents of this bulletin please contact the author.

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