

# Frequent Sources of Hidden Gluten

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**Note:** the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act went into effect on January 2006, which ensured that wheat (as one of the eight major food allergens) must always be shown on applicable food product labels—either in the listing of ingredients themselves or after the ingredients list in a “CONTAINS:” statement.

## 1. Grab-and-Go Foods

**Candies** ~ While there are many candies that are gluten free, many more contain gluten. Most folks are not surprised to learn that candies that contain cookie ingredients contain gluten, but they are surprised to learn that others like licorice (or similar; e.g., Twizzlers) contain wheat. Many other candies contain gluten in the form of barley for flavoring. Read labels and be wary of accepting or taking candy with no packaging.

**Chips** ~ Flavored potato chips (e.g., barbecued flavor, sour cream and onion) can contain gluten. Some new varieties of “whole grain” or “multi-grain” chips may also contain gluten. Don’t dip the chip without knowing that it’s gluten free!

**“Formed” Products** ~ I asked my son for his input on products that contain hidden gluten and he said, “Anything that is mixed and then molded or shaped probably has gluten in it.” Great point. He talked about specific candies and some brands of beef jerky (for the latter, some brands also contain gluten via soy sauce for flavoring).

## 2. Cooking

**Broth** ~ The unsafe gluten ingredient that can be present in commercially prepared chicken broth, beef broth, or stock is usually wheat. Therefore, wheat will be shown on the ingredients label. Similarly, some chicken bouillon can contain gluten. Read the ingredients label.

**Condiments**~ There are many condiments that are gluten free, but sometimes gluten is used as a stabilizer and thickener, so read labels and do your due diligence. If you share a household with gluten consumers, it is imperative that separate condiments be maintained. It’s unrealistic to think that the members of your household who eat gluten will know or remember not to contaminate the mayo jar when they stick a knife inside the jar, spread mayo on bread, and then realize that they need more mayo. That same knife will go back in the mayo jar and the jar suddenly become cross contaminated and a source of gluten. Similarly, there are many who will touch the ketchup container right to the gluten-containing bun, bread, seasoned fries, etc. and the ketchup container then becomes a source of hidden gluten.

**Kitchen Equipment** ~ Toasters used for gluten-full bread, old pans and baking sheets, cutting boards, baking stones, and wooden utensils can all be sources of hidden gluten. (A black light that would show gluten would be so very handy, don’t you think?)

## 3. Eating Out

The opportunities for cross contamination are endless in restaurants, and even a gluten-free menu doesn’t guarantee a gluten-free meal. Every single individual must be fully trained on serving the gluten-free patron and keeping gluten-free ingredients/dishes free of gluten contamination. One poorly trained individual and/or one misstep is all it takes to provide an unsafe meal. But let’s focus instead on foods and dishes that may have hidden gluten in restaurants. The risk can also be greater when eating out because we don’t have ready access to ingredients listings.

**Beverages**~ This category includes non-alcoholic and alcoholic liquid refreshments. I was with a group of bloggers, most of whom were gluten free, at a food blogger conference a while back. During a break between sessions, we were sampling some of the vendors' wares. We immediately asked if the beverages were gluten free. The answer was "Yes, these are." What we didn't pick up on was that there was an emphasis on the "these" and a specialized sweep of the company reps' hands, indicating that only particular flavors of the brand were gluten free. We discovered this info after continuing to reading ingredients labels as we sipped.

That gluten can be present in tea also surprises folks. Barley is the usual source. Holiday and specialty teas are more frequent sources of gluten than basic teas. Special scrutiny should be paid to teas with name that include "gingerbread" and "sugar cookie," as gluten is used to achieve that baked good taste. Similarly, flavored coffees can sometimes contain gluten.

The biggest concern for alcoholic beverages typically is beer. Unless it is made from special gluten-free ingredients and/or processed to be gluten free, beer is off limits. I've seen this news come as a shock to gluten-free newbies. The health care professional who diagnosed them had warned them about pasta, bread, crackers and baked goods, but had forgotten to mention beer.

**Dressings, Marinades, Sauces, and Soups** ~ I was very surprised to learn that an area restaurant's homemade Caesar dressing contained soy sauce (which, of course, contained wheat). If I had not notified my waiter of my dining needs and he had not been well informed on the restaurant menu and ingredients, I might have been "glutened." Others have found that soy sauce has been used in all types of dishes, and in decidedly non-Asian fare. Soy sauce is often used in marinades, and beer may sometimes be used as well. Sauces and soups are often thickened with wheat-based flour versus naturally gluten-free thickeners such as cornstarch, potato starch, and tapioca starch/flour.

**Egg Dishes** ~ Some well-known chain restaurants add flour or pancake batter to scrambled eggs and omelets. One should always ask if either have been added when ordering egg dishes—even in the finest restaurants—just to be safe.

**Salad** ~ Of course, salad on its own is gluten free ... lettuces and other salad greens, carrots, onions, tomatoes and the like are gluten free. However, many restaurants will make salad in a homongous bowl and then the wait staff will serve individual salads from that bowl. If the restaurant uses croutons in that bowl, you must ask for your salad to be made fresh, separately without croutons. (Note: If ever you receive a salad with croutons, or say a bread stick on top, hold on to it until the server replaces it, as restaurant staff have been known to simply pick out croutons or remove the bread stick.)

**Water Used in Food Preparation**~ Are you ordering steamed seafood? Does the restaurant use beer to steam to add special taste to its seafood offerings? If so, either you must abstain, or you must ask if the chef will steam your seafood in plain water in a separate, clean pot. (Do not assume on the latter.) Are you ordering steamed veggies for healthier fare? Be sure the restaurant doesn't use the same water that it has used to boil its pasta in to also steam its veggies. This happens more often than you would think and not asking that question has gotten me "glutened" at least once.

#### 4. Non-Food Sources

Please don't stop your vigilance at food sources; consider the following.

**Art Supplies**~ Numerous art supplies—like mainstream brands of play dough and finger paint—contain gluten. Heidi at Adventures of a Gluten-Free Mom has an excellent post on gluten-free art supplies [here](#). As Heidi says, little ones are notorious for putting their hands in their mouths.

**Makeup and Lotions** ~ Choose lipstick and facial lotions (or any product that could wind up in your mouth) that are gluten free. Deciphering the ingredients on these labels is not easy, so select products that have simple ingredients like coconut oil and shea butter or shop from a product line that is entirely gluten free.

**Medications and Supplements**~ Gluten is also sometimes present in medications. I'm talking about prescription and over-the-counter drugs, and vitamins and supplements. Alice Bast, founder and president of NFCA, states "When you look at the word gluten, think glue. It is often used as a binder." NFCA is in the midst of a two-part study on [Gluten in Medications](#), which was funded by a \$50,000 grant from the FDA.

**Pet Food**~ Unless you are purchasing grain-free pet food, it most likely does contain gluten. Make sure to wash your hands after handling any pet food. This issue may even be more of a concern for the gluten-free child touching the pet's food dish and then his/her mouth, kissing the family pet, etc.

## 5. The Gluten-Free Watchdog

Those are just a few sources for hidden gluten, but I'd like to share another component of the hidden gluten equation. As most of you know, there are no current standards for a "gluten-free" label in place in the U.S. at this time. The Food and Drug Administration's proposed standard from a few years ago remains at less than 20 parts per million (ppm). Final passage of this amount has not occurred; the latest data from the open comment period held months ago is still being evaluated. We also know that we are seeing more and more products labeled "gluten free." Does that mean such products really are gluten free?

That's what the Gluten Free Watchdog program is finding out. Founded and maintained by Tricia Thompson ([The Gluten-Free Dietitian](#)), the Gluten Free Watchdog program tests "gluten-free" products weekly.

The most important thing to know is that while most of the products that the Gluten Free Watchdog has tested are gluten free to less than 5 ppm gluten, a handful of products have tested well above 20 ppm gluten. These findings point to the scariest sources of hidden gluten of all—the ones with "gluten free" labels that you believe are safe. Please take a moment to check out the [Gluten Free Watchdog Alerts page](#) to see which products have tested positive for gluten at 20 ppm or above. I have not seen this information shared enough with the gluten-free public and folks are still consuming these products and getting ill. (Note: Only subscribers get the product testing reports immediately with the specific testing results.)

Finally, do your best to "stay safe out there." For staying safe and living gluten free easily (gfe), I'm a huge proponent of real food that is naturally gluten free. There is no hidden gluten in the products that are ready to eat "as is" (obviously, cooking will be needed in some cases). Think meat, seafood, fruit, vegetables, and dairy. As they come in their natural forms (without processing or "additives"), these foods are gluten free all day long!

Handout from Roberta Strickler

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