

Gluten free prescribing guidelines – frequently asked questions

Why are you making changes to your gluten free prescribing guidance?

We need to use our prescribing budget for medicines where it can do the most good. In recent years the variety and accessibility of gluten free products in shops and online has improved dramatically.

Faced with competing funding demands we have decided that we can no longer fund gluten free foods on prescription, other than a limited range of staple foods such as bread, pasta, flour and multipurpose mixes for patients under the age of 18.

How did you make the decision to change your gluten free prescribing guidance?

The decision was taken by the Northern Eastern and Western Devon Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), a local NHS organisation made up of membership of all the GP practices in the CCG area. The decision was taken following an engagement process that included GPs, secondary care clinicians, patients and other stakeholders.

Why are you only prescribing bread, pasta, flour and multipurpose mixes for patients less than 18 years of age?

We are funding bread as it is considered a staple food; pasta because it is a common “fast-food” in many people’s diets and not easy to make; flour and multi-purpose mixes so that people can cook or bake other foods.

Why are only some brands included?

We have included a range of the commonly prescribed brands that have the lowest cost to the NHS. This will help us ensure that we are getting the best value from NHS funds.

Do you still recommend prescribing foods for any patient groups with other conditions?

We will continue to prescribe foods for a small number of patients with rare metabolic conditions such as phenylketonuria. These products are not widely available in shops and online, so following a diet for these conditions without access to foods on prescription would be much harder than for a gluten free diet.

If people can't afford gluten free products, won't it cost the NHS more in treatment costs in the long term?

Gluten free products are more expensive but that is not a reason for the NHS to fund them through prescriptions. We hope that most patients will make wise dietary choices to avoid being ill.

What are the risks of introducing this guidance?

We understand that there are always risks associated with any change and that we need to minimise the risks.

By recommending that gluten free products are not prescribed for patients age 18 years and over, there is the risk that some patients, particularly those with learning disabilities, dementia or mental health problems, may have difficulty managing their coeliac disease and may experience health problems as a consequence. It is important that carers for these patients understand the importance of following a gluten free diet and are supported to do so.

Will you be offering extra support for people with coeliac disease who will no longer receive gluten free foods on prescription?

We will continue to support, advise and monitor patients diagnosed with coeliac disease through our GP practices, dietetics services and gastroenterology departments.

We will prepare GPs, dietitians and gastroenterologists for this change so that they are alert to any potential risks for vulnerable patients.

We encourage patients with coeliac disease who are having difficulty maintaining a gluten free diet to seek advice and support from Coeliac UK who provide a lot of useful information and resources on their website www.coeliac.org.uk

If I can no longer get gluten free foods on prescription how will I manage my coeliac disease?

Following a gluten free diet can be achieved without resorting to specially formulated foods on prescription, by avoiding foods which naturally contain gluten. In addition gluten free foods are widely available in shops and online, so you can continue to buy and eat appropriate foods. You can

also seek advice from your GP, community pharmacy, dietitian and at the Coeliac UK website www.coeliac.org.uk

I cannot afford to buy gluten free foods as I am on a low income. Will I be able to receive gluten free foods on prescription?

The guidance applies to all patients age 18 years and over. Following a gluten free diet can be achieved by avoiding foods that naturally contain gluten. Coeliac UK has produced a "Gluten free diet on a budget" leaflet which is available on their website.

Why are you not funding pizza bases on prescription?

Gluten free pizza bases are available from shops and online at a reasonable cost and are similarly priced to the equivalent gluten-containing products.

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 do gluten free products cost more to the NHS than the price in supermarkets?

Gluten free products are more expensive than gluten-containing products but it is still unclear why the NHS is charged so much for gluten free products. There is no obvious reason as to why prescribable items cost more than double the supermarket price of similar items.

Are gluten free products that I buy in shops and online the same quality as those on prescription?

There is a law that covers the use of the labelling term gluten free. The term gluten free can only be used on foods which contain 20 parts per million (ppm) or less of gluten.

When you see gluten free on a label, you know these foods are suitable for a gluten free diet.

We have looked at the nutritional information of a range of gluten free foods, and whilst the amounts of sugar, fat and added vitamins and minerals vary between brands, this applies to both prescription items and those available to buy.

Some brands of gluten free products are available both on prescription and to buy in shops and online.

Are there not other ways in which the NHS could save money?

The NHS is constantly looking for ways to save money without impact on patient care, so that we are able to ensure provision of high quality care for those who most need it. This means that we have to look at how we can do things differently and every little helps.

The basis of this recommendation is not to penalise those who suffer from coeliac disease but to provide some support to patients less than 18 years of age 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 our population.

Coeliacs are not alone - there are frequently restrictions on the range of items that can be supplied under the NHS. Examples include the provision of a synthetic wig (but not a real-hair wig), dentures, crowns and bridges (but not dental implants) and basic spectacle frames (but not necessarily fashionable ones).

How will this guidance affect people who have coeliac-type symptoms but have not been tested or diagnosed?

The guidance will not affect those people since the NHS should not be prescribing gluten free foods for people without a confirmed diagnosis of Coeliac Disease or Dermatitis Herpetiformis.

If you have any comments or queries relating to this information, please contact the **Patient Advice and Complaints Team**:

Telephone: 01392 267 665 or 0300 123 1672 (lines are open Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm)

Email: pals.devon@nhs.net

Write to:

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