



NEWS RELEASE

Defense Commissary Agency

Office of Communication

1300 E Avenue □ Fort Lee, VA 23801-1800

Tel: (804) 734-8000, Ext. 4-8524 DSN: 687-8000, Ext. 4-8524

FAX: (804) 734-8248 DSN: 687-8248

www.commissaries.com

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Contact: Lt. Col. Karen E. Hawkins, DeCA dietitian
Tel.: (804) 734-8000, Ext. 4-8404
E-mail: karen.hawkins@deca.mil

What's the deal on going gluten-free?

*By Lt. Col. Karen E. Hawkins,
DeCA dietitian*

Editor's note: *This is the second in a series of three articles designed to help explain what going gluten-free is all about.*

FORT LEE, Va. – Each week as a dietitian I talk with someone who has to go gluten-free in their diet due to a medical reason such as celiac disease. No easy task at first, trying to figure out what to eat and not eat. Folks quickly become experts in searching for and finding gluten-free foods in the commissary that not only meet their needs but also appeal to their tastes.

With as many as 1 in 133 people having gluten intolerance, more people are shopping for gluten-free foods in their commissary, where they can save 30 percent or more on their purchases when compared to commercial prices.

What is being done?

In 2004, Congress enacted the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA). The law required that by 2006 food manufacturers list on their products — in plain English — the presence of the most common allergy-provoking, life-threatening foods: milk, eggs, tree nuts, peanuts, shellfish, soy and wheat. FALCPA gave the Food and Drug Administration until 2006 to propose a rule to define the term “gluten-free” and to develop guidelines for how and when food manufacturers can use the term. In 2007, the FDA proposed the definition for gluten-free and guidelines for its use on food labels. Defining gluten-free is challenging because foods are complex mixtures of ingredients. Currently, a food is defined as

gluten-free if it contains less than 20 parts per million (ppm) of gluten. Manufacturers were given until 2008 to begin labeling foods as gluten-free. The final rule is still out and before developing it, the FDA is considering the comments it receives from consumers and manufacturers.

Information about the Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act can be found by clicking on the following link:

<http://www.fda.gov/Food/LabelingNutrition/FoodAllergensLabeling/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/ucm111487.htm>

How is the FDA proposing to define the term “gluten-free”?

The FDA proposes to define the term “gluten-free” to mean that a food bearing this claim in its labeling does **not** contain any one of the following:

- An ingredient that is a prohibited grain;
- An ingredient that is derived from a prohibited grain and that has not been processed to remove gluten;
- An ingredient that is derived from a prohibited grain and that has been processed to remove gluten, if the use of that ingredient results in the presence of 20 parts per million (ppm) or more gluten in the food; or
- 20 ppm or more gluten

Will foods that meet the definition for gluten-free be required to bear a “gluten-free” claim?

No. The FDA is proposing to define the term “gluten-free” for voluntary use in the labeling of foods. In other words, once a final federal definition of the term is in effect, if a manufacturer wishes to label his product as gluten-free, it may do so at its own discretion, but only if the food bearing the label meets the proposed regulatory definition.

What are some foods that are naturally gluten-free?

- Milk (nonfat dry milk);
- 100 percent fruit or vegetable juices;
- Fresh fruits and vegetables that are not coated with a wax or resin that contains gluten;
- A variety of single ingredient foods: butter, eggs, lentils, peanuts, seeds like flax, tree nuts like almonds, nongluten-containing grains like corn, fresh fish like cod, fresh shellfish like clams, honey, and water.

What are examples of food products that would be prohibited from using the term “gluten-free” in their labeling under the proposed rule?

- Barley, common wheat, rye, spelt, kamut, triticale
- Farina, vital gluten, semolina, malt vinegar

Why did the FDA not include oats as one of the prohibited grains in its proposed definition of the term “gluten-free”?

There is no consensus among nutrition experts or authorities on the unconditional exclusion of oats from the diet of people with celiac disease. For example, the following celiac disease experts and authorities do not support the unconditional exclusion of oats: the National Institutes of Health, the American Dietetic Association, and some celiac disease research and treatment centers.

Research data suggests that the majority of people with celiac disease can tolerate a daily intake of a limited amount (e.g., 50 grams) of oats that are free of gluten from wheat, rye, barley or their crossbred hybrids.

Oats are reported to add variety, taste, satiety, dietary fiber and other essential nutrients to the diet of people with celiac disease and may make their diet more appealing. Allowing oats free of gluten from wheat, rye, barley or their crossbred hybrids to bear a gluten-free labeling claim would make it easier for consumers to identify such oats in the marketplace and may serve as an incentive for more manufacturers to produce them.

For more information about making healthy choices, visit Ask the Dietitian on <http://www.commissaries.com> and post your questions on the DeCA Dietitian Forum. Be sure to look for other useful information in the Dietitian’s Voice archive. Sign up with the DeCA Dietitian on www.twitter.com and get messages sent to your cell phone today. For delicious recipes, check out Kay’s Kitchen. And to enjoy all your commissary has to offer, sign up for the *Commissary Connection*.

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About DeCA: *The Defense Commissary Agency operates a worldwide chain of commissaries providing groceries to military personnel, retirees and their families in a safe and secure shopping environment. Authorized patrons purchase items at cost plus a 5-percent surcharge, which covers the costs of building new commissaries and modernizing existing ones.*

Shoppers save an average of more than 30 percent on their purchases compared to commercial prices – savings worth about \$3,300 annually for a family of four. A core military family support element, and a valued part of military pay and benefits, commissaries contribute to family readiness, enhance the quality of life for America's military and their families, and help recruit and retain the best and brightest men and women to serve their country.