



# How Healthy Is Your Gluten-Free Diet?

An excerpt from *Real Life with Celiac Disease*



Surveys conducted in the United States and England suggest that those following a gluten-free diet may not get enough iron, calcium, fiber, or whole grains. The table shows the daily reference intakes and healthy food choices for these nutrients. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Nutrient Database Web site, [www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search](http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search), lists the nutrient content of many more foods.

Although avoiding gluten in the diet takes a little extra effort, it is important not to lose sight of the importance of a healthy, balanced, and wholesome diet. A “balanced” diet is one that includes adequate amounts of the various nutrients required to sustain life, maintain energy, and prevent chronic disease.

No one food or food group is superior to any other. What you want is a variety of “nutrient-dense” foods, which are rich in vitamins, minerals, and/or phytonutrients (such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, dried beans, legumes, whole grains, lean meats, and lean dairy products), and few foods with “empty” calories but very little nutrients (such as sodas, baked goods, and alcohol).

Although your main source of good nutrition should come from real food like vegetables, fruits, lean meats, gluten-free grains, and healthy fats (rather than food products), your physician and nutritionist can advise you about whether you need additional vitamin or mineral supplementation.

## Nutrients Found to be Low or Deficient in Gluten-Free Diets

| Nutrient       | Gluten-Free Food Source  | Dietary Reference Intake   |
|----------------|--|--|
| <b>Iron</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Beef, pork, lamb (choose red meats that are lean)</li> <li>Green leafy vegetables: spinach, asparagus, broccoli, collard greens, mustard greens, kale, turnip greens, parsley, cabbage</li> <li>Fortified foods: gluten-free oatmeal, rice, corn grits</li> <li>Salmon, shrimp, tuna, oysters, clams, most kinds of seafood</li> <li>Most kinds of legumes: lima beans, kidney beans, navy beans, soy beans, chick peas, pinto beans, black-eyed peas</li> <li>Grains: teff, amaranth, quinoa</li> <li>Nuts/seeds: almonds, cashews, walnuts, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds or tahini, pumpkin seeds</li> <li>Dried fruits: apricots, raisins, dates (not rolled in flour), prunes, figs</li> <li>Turkey, chicken, egg yolks</li> </ul> | 8 mg/day<br>(males >18 yr and females >50 yr)<br>18 mg/day<br>(females 19–50 yr) |
| <b>Calcium</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Milk: bottled, canned, evaporated (lactose-free milk if lactose intolerant)</li> <li>Low-fat or fat-free yogurt</li> <li>Cheese, ricotta (part skim milk)</li> <li>Gluten-free chocolate milk</li> <li>Fortified gluten-free rice, hemp, soy, or nut milk</li> <li>Collards: frozen, chopped, cooked, boiled, drained, without salt</li> <li>Rhubarb: frozen, cooked</li> <li>Anchovies, sardines canned with bone, salmon canned with bone, Atlantic cod, Pacific herring, canned jack mackerel, sunfish, caviar</li> <li>Shrimp, blue crab</li> <li>Low-fat gluten-free eggnog</li> </ul>   | 1000 mg<br>(males and females 19–50 yr)<br>1200 mg<br>(males and females >50 yr) |
| <b>Fiber</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raspberries, blueberries, strawberries, pear or apple with skin, banana, oranges, dried figs</li> <li>Split peas, lentils, black beans, lima beans, gluten-free baked beans, sunflower seeds, almonds, pistachios, pecans</li> <li>Artichokes, peas, broccoli, turnip greens, sweet corn, Brussels sprouts, potatoes with skin, tomato paste, raw carrots</li> <li>Amaranth, buckwheat, corn, millet, gluten-free oats, quinoa, sorghum, teff, wild rice, brown rice, air-popped popcorn</li> </ul>   | 38 g (males <50)<br>30 g (males >50)<br>25 g (females <50)<br>21 g (females >50) |

From Nora Decher, MS, RD, CNSC, and Carol Rees Parrish, MS, RD: *Balanced and Nutritious: A Healthy Gluten Free Diet. In Real Life with Celiac Disease: Troubleshooting and Thriving Gluten Free* by Melinda Dennis, MS, RD, LDN, and Daniel A. Leffler, MD.

[www.reallifewithceliacdisease.com](http://www.reallifewithceliacdisease.com)