

**Question and Answer
Availability of Gluten Free foods on prescription**

6 July 2016

Q. What has changed?

A. The quantity of prescribed Gluten Free food that each Coeliac patient can order will be reduced by 50%. The CCG will be reviewing the position, with a view to stopping prescribing of Gluten Free food in 12 months' time.

The number of units recommended for each patient is different based on a number of variables including age, sex and whether pregnant. NHS Castle Point and Rochford CCG will be working with Coeliac UK to agree a workable number of units for patients.

Q. Why has this decision been taken?

A. In the current economic climate tough decisions have to be made to ensure we can continue to meet the health needs of all our population.

Across Castle Point and Rochford, there is a spend of £100,800 per annum on prescribed Gluten Free food. Gluten Free products can be very expensive when obtained via an NHS prescription and the products are often considerably more costly than the price of a similar gluten free product purchased in the supermarket. We recognise that gluten free products are more costly than their gluten containing equivalents from the supermarket and thus remain committed to continue to support Gluten Free prescribing in part, rather than stopping the prescribing of all items altogether at this time. We will be reviewing this in 12 months' time.

Gluten Free prescribing started more than 30 years ago when such products were not easily available to buy in the shops, and so the NHS offered the prescription service to help coeliac patients better manage their diet. However, due to changing diets and lifestyle choices there is now a much wider variety of foods available in the shops and supermarkets and Gluten Free alternatives are widely available too.

It is apparent that most supermarkets now stock a range of Gluten Free foods and accessibility has improved. However it is more difficult to purchase products from the prescription brand leaders (Juvella and Glutafin). They are currently not available through supermarkets but can be ordered via pharmacies.

Q. When will this decision impact on Coeliac patients?

A. Now that a decision has been reached, an implementation plan will be put in place, with a view to notifying GPs/pharmacies and other prescribers as soon as possible.

Q. What was the process for the decision-making?

A. With support from local GP members, a public consultation was undertaken (jointly with Southend CCG) to gather patients' views on the perceived impact of stopping or restricting Gluten Free prescribing. The majority of respondents were patients with coeliac disease or relatives of patients with coeliac disease. Of these most were in favour of the continued prescribing of Gluten Free food. A range of options were developed and costed for consideration.

Following discussion with the CCG's Clinical Executive Committee and further to consultation with local clinicians at Locality Commissioning Groups, the Governing Body considered all the available information before making a decision. At an extraordinary Governing Body meeting, held in public on 30 June 2016, the Governing Body made a unanimous decision to reduce the quantity of Gluten Free products that are available on NHS prescription by 50%, and to review the position in a year's time.

Q. Is the CCG considering other areas of prescribing restrictions?

A. Yes we will be reviewing other areas and treatments that are shown to be less clinically effective, provide insufficient health benefits and those that do not represent good value for money.

Q. Will my food shopping cost more now I am getting fewer Gluten Free foods on prescription?

A. Although specifically manufactured Gluten Free (GF) foods bought in shops are slightly more expensive than their similar gluten containing foods (such as GF pasta compared to wheat pasta), there are many foods that are naturally GF. These include meat, fish, nuts, lentils, fruit and vegetables, milk and dairy, rice and potatoes. Processed foods which don't contain gluten, such as ready meals, soups, breakfast cereals and sauces can be found in the Coeliac UK Food and Drink Directory (available free of charge to all members of Coeliac UK).

Q. Am I able to maintain a varied and balanced diet without the wide range of Gluten Free Foods on prescription?

A. A healthy balanced diet can be achieved by eating a variety of foods from the five different food groups of the [Eatwell plate](#) in the correct proportions. Total Carbohydrate should provide 50 per cent total energy intake. This can be made up of naturally Gluten Free foods such as rice, potatoes, polenta, buckwheat/ soya/ rice/ corn/ cassava flour, naturally occurring sugars in milk and fruit, as well as Gluten Free prescribable food.