

# Preventing Cross-Contamination

Children's National Health System Celiac Disease Program



## Preventing Cross-Contamination in Your Kitchen

### When on a gluten-free diet,

staying safe means avoiding any potential sources of cross-contamination. This can happen very easily and unintentionally, so it is important to understand the many ways in which cross-contamination can occur at home. While a household does not need to be entirely gluten-free in order to be safe, there are several measures that can be taken to ensure utensils, condiments, frying oil, boiling water, and food preparation surfaces are sterilized to remain safely gluten-free. It is not any more difficult than preventing against bacteria, just remember to keep kitchen elements clean.

- **BOILING WATER:** Gluten-free pasta and gluten-containing pasta **cannot** be cooked in the same water. Gluten from the gluten-containing pasta will contaminate the water and make those with celiac disease sick. The same applies to cooking gluten-free items such as quinoa, rice, vegetables, or potatoes in boiling water that has already come into contact with gluten-containing ingredients. Additionally, if the food being prepared requires straining, be sure that only gluten-free items go into one strainer while gluten-containing foods are strained in a separate colander, or be sure gluten-free foods are strained first.
- **CONDIMENTS:** Any condiment that it is used as a dip with a utensil should not be used with both gluten-free and gluten-containing foods. Particles from gluten-containing ingredients easily contaminate jars of peanut butter, cream cheese, butter, etc. that were dipped in it. To be extra cautious, in a mixed gluten household, consider buying separate condiments and labeling one set as gluten-free. Those eating gluten-free foods should only use the gluten-free set of condiments. Otherwise, have a conversation with the family and/or housemates about scooping out a portion of the item onto a plate before spreading it onto the gluten-containing item to ensure only a clean knife has been dipped into the container once. For other condiments like ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise, and relish, consider buying squeeze bottles to prevent cross contamination from dipping into the containers.
- **CUTTING BOARDS:** Thoroughly scrubbing a plastic or glass cutting board before and after each use makes it completely safe to share with gluten-free and gluten-containing items, assuming they're not being used at the same time. However, it often helps to have two sets of cutting boards in the kitchen to be absolutely safe.

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Consider picking a different color cutting board for the gluten-free set, so families can easily identify which board is safe to use. It also is the safest to use plastic or glass cutting boards whenever possible. Wooden cutting boards can absorb foods like gluten, and in turn, could lead to cross-contamination even after washing.

- **FRYING:** Never fry gluten-free and gluten-containing items in the same oil. Particles from the gluten-containing items will fall into the oil and contaminate the gluten-free foods. Even if the oil looks clean, don't trust it. Always use clean oil for gluten-free foods. This issue is particularly important in restaurants. When ordering fried foods, always ask if the restaurant uses separate oil for gluten-free and gluten-containing items.
- **POTS AND PANS:** Always wash pots and pans thoroughly between each use. As long as they are washed properly, it is safe to cook both gluten-free and gluten-containing items in the same pots and pans. Think of it this way: if pots and pans are washed well enough to prevent food-borne bacteria from spreading, then they also are sufficiently cleaned to prevent gluten contamination.
- **SHELVES AND DRAWERS:** Consider designating space within the kitchen storage areas for gluten-free foods. This will help to visually separate the items that need to be kept free of cross-contamination. If gluten-free and gluten-containing items must be in the same shelves and drawers, always store the gluten-free products above the gluten-containing items. This method will prevent gluten particles from falling into the gluten-free products.
- **TOASTING:** Crumbs quickly accumulate in every toaster. There is no way to prevent it. Bread crumbles and creates a massive problem for cross-contamination. If using a **toaster oven** that is thoroughly cleaned between each use, there is no reason to have separate toasters. Another option for using a toaster oven is to **always** line the racks with foil when toasting gluten-free items. This will prevent cross-contamination and limit the in-between-use cleaning. However, if using a **pop-up toaster** that is unable to be easily cleaned out, it's recommended to have a designated gluten-free toaster.
- **METAL OR PLASTIC UTENSILS:** As with each and every other piece of kitchen equipment, the same metal or plastic utensils cannot be used with gluten-free and gluten-containing items without a thorough cleaning. Either make the decision to always wash the utensils in between use or purchase a second set of designated gluten-free items.
- **WOODEN BOARDS, BOWLS, AND UTENSILS:** Never use wooden kitchen equipment with both gluten-free and gluten-containing foods. Gluten can stick in between the wood grains, and even a thorough washing cannot properly get it out. Either purchase two sets, or avoid wooden equipment all together if living in a shared kitchen space.



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