



Our gluten-free guidelines - **Your questions**

Why have you stopped funding some gluten-free foods?

In recent years the variety and accessibility of gluten free products in supermarkets has improved dramatically. The vast majority of foods are naturally gluten-free, however, we do recognise that some specialist gluten-free products cost more than the equivalent gluten containing items. We have therefore looked at ways in which we can minimise the financial pressures rather than stop prescribing altogether.

We have decided to limit prescribing of gluten-free foods to staples that are more expensive to buy as a gluten free product in the supermarkets, i.e. bread and flour.

Why are you prescribing only bread and flour?

The decision was taken to fund bread as bread is considered to be a staple food in the UK and the gluten free breads are more costly than the gluten containing equivalents in the supermarkets. The addition of flour (including multipurpose flour and bread mixes) allows people to cook or bake other foods.

Why are only some brands of bread and flour included?

We have included all brands that are available as a stock item to local pharmacies from the majority of local wholesalers without restrictions on minimum order. We have excluded products that have additional administration charges, delivery or other charges added to the list price as these costs will be incurred by the NHS and mean that the single products end up being significantly more expensive to the NHS than if they were purchased from a supermarket.

Why have you now included fresh bread?

We appreciate that many people prefer fresh bread and many gluten free suppliers have now removed the substantial surcharges that were associated with fresh bread.

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 are you no longer funding biscuits, cakes, etc.?

It is generally accepted that these products are treats and not part of an every day healthy diet. To prescribe items on the NHS considered treats would be at odds with national health messages.

Why are you not funding pizza bases and pasta on prescription any more?

There are various naturally gluten free foods that can be eaten in place of pasta, such as potatoes, rice, rice noodles etc. Also gluten-free pizza bases and pasta are available from supermarkets at a reasonable cost and are similarly priced to the equivalent gluten-containing products.

Some areas have set up schemes allowing people to get their gluten-free products straight from their pharmacy without a prescription – why can't you do this?

We could do this but it would not save any money. We would still have to pay the pharmacies for the items provided. The Prescription Pricing Authority currently arranges payments to pharmacies on our behalf. However, if we were to stop using prescriptions and supply straight from the pharmacy we would have to set up administration locally to deal with the payments, which would actually add to the cost. We do not currently have the resources locally to set this up.

Cost of gluten-free products to the NHS

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

We are constantly looking for ways to save money without impact on patient care. This means that we have to look at how we can do things differently and every little helps. The basis of this policy is not to penalise those who suffer from Coeliac disease but to provide some support 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 both on prescription and other items. Examples of other areas where this applies include the provision of a synthetic wig (but not a real-hair wig), dentures, crowns and bridges (but not dental implants), basic spectacle frames (but not necessarily fashionable ones).

For more information, please contact your local pharmacy or surgery.

Surgery/pharmacy name	Address