



After a patient with celiac disease has improved functioning of the gastrointestinal tract, the patient needs to be evaluated for cardiovascular disease risks which affect the general population. Heart disease is currently the #1 leading cause of death for both men and women in this country. Sometimes, while the celiac patient has healed their intestines by following a GF diet, they have also been consuming many gluten-free products that are loaded with excessive calories, fat, salt and sugar. This can contribute to weight gain and additional risk factors like high cholesterol and blood pressure, which can ultimately lead to heart disease.

## Applying a Heart Healthy Diet to a Gluten-Free Lifestyle

### Fat

The type and amount is key when it comes to fat intake. Saturated and trans fats raise blood cholesterol and must be limited. Saturated fat is solid at room temperature and found mostly in meat, poultry with skin, whole milk, high fat dairy products, and even coconut milk. Trans fat is found in many processed foods such as crackers, cookies, stick margarine and shortening. The best fats to use are unsaturated (both polyunsaturated and monounsaturated). These are liquid at room temperature and include foods such as vegetable oils, nuts, seeds, avocado, and fatty fish (salmon, herring, trout).

### Sugar

Provides many excessive and empty calories that can contribute to weight gain, thus putting people at an increased risk for cardiovascular disease. Keep sugar intake to a minimum. Try fruit and more natural sugars than candy and desserts.

### Sodium

Be aware that some gluten-free foods as well as non GF foods are packed with extra salt to satisfy our tastes and preserve the product. Most Americans get far more sodium than the body requires. This can raise blood pressure levels and lead to further complications with heart disease.

### Fiber

Focus on soluble fiber. This forms a substance in the intestines which helps to block cholesterol absorption. Dietary fiber also binds with cholesterol allowing it to be excreted from the body. Good gluten-free fiber sources include fresh fruit, vegetables, legumes and whole grains.

### Plant Stanols/Sterols

Plant stanols and sterols can be used to decrease LDL cholesterol (the bad kind) by inhibiting cholesterol absorption from the digestive tract. Products with added plant stanols and sterols are now commercially available and often appropriate for the GF lifestyle. However, be sure to check the label as with all foods not necessarily labeled as "gluten-free."

## Food Label "Rule of Thumb"

Choose items with no more than:

3 grams of Total Fat per serving size

2 grams of Saturated Fat + Trans Fat per serving size

250 milligrams of Sodium per serving

In addition, try to choose foods with at least:  
2-3 grams of Dietary Fiber per serving

Please consider your local GIG branch as another resource.

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*GIG is a nonprofit 501c3 national organization providing support for per persons with gluten intolerances, in order to live health, productive lives. GIG Branches provide support at a local level.*