



Changes to gluten free prescribing - 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, some specialist gluten free products cost more than the equivalent gluten containing items. Prescribing staple gluten free foods which are more expensive to buy in the supermarket such as bread and mixes will help subsidise a gluten free diet.

Why are you prescribing only bread and mixes?

The outcome of a national consultation by the Department of Health was to retain a limited range of bread and mixes on prescription. This means that other gluten free foods e.g. pasta, pizza bases, cereals, grains, flour and biscuits etc., will no longer be prescribed.

Why are only some brands of bread and mixes included?

To ensure that the gluten free products that remain available on prescription will be cost effective for prescribing through the NHS and provide appropriate patients with basic provisions to support a gluten free diet.

Will fresh bread be included?

Yes - many people prefer fresh bread and many gluten free suppliers have now removed the substantial surcharges that were associated with fresh bread. Where fresh GF bread is prescribed, it is advised to freeze surplus quantities immediately upon receipt as fresh GF bread deteriorates rapidly if stored at room temperature.

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.?

Biscuits and cakes are not considered part of a healthy diet and for the practice and the NHS as a whole to prescribe these would be at odds with national health messages. For more information and advice on a healthy eating contact your local pharmacy, surgery or find out more from NHS Choices www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/ .

Why are you not funding pizza bases and pasta on NHS prescription anymore?

The outcome of the consultation was to retain a limited range of bread and mixes only on prescription. There are various naturally gluten free foods that can be eaten in place of pasta, such as potatoes, rice, rice noodles etc. Gluten free pizza bases and pasta are available from supermarkets at a reasonable cost and are similarly priced to the equivalent gluten containing products.

Cost of gluten free products to the NHS

Gluten free products on prescription cost more than gluten free products in the supermarket. It is unclear why the NHS is charged so much for gluten free products. There is no obvious reason as



to why these items prescribed on the NHS cost more than double the supermarket price of similar items.

Are there no other ways in which the NHS could save money?

The NHS is constantly looking for ways to save money without impact on patient care. This means that the NHS has to look for ways of doing 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 the population.

Patients with coeliac disease are not alone - there are frequently restrictions on the range of items that can be supplied on the NHS on prescription. Examples include over the counter items for self-limiting and minor conditions (e.g. sun creams, dandruff shampoo) 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