

Eating With Food Restrictions
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There are not many of us who have breezed through life without ever going on some kind of diet. Some cut back on calories or cut out foods in an effort to lose weight on a traditional calorie restricted diet, others cut out entire food groups in an effort to just feel healthier. Regardless of the reason, almost everyone finds it challenging to constantly monitor what they eat, be vigilant about reading labels for calories, carbs, fat, sugar, artificial sweeteners and other chemicals, and navigate menus when eating out. Let's look at three of the most popular food restrictions, what they really mean, and how to navigate them: Low Calorie, Low Carb, and Gluten Free.

Although I never recommend cutting calories as a simple solution for weight loss, dieting is still a 34 billion dollar per year industry. Following a standard calorie-restricted diet (anything under 1,200 calories per day), as any lifetime dieter can tell you, is not a lot of fun and doesn't work in the long run, but if you are tempted to go "back on" that diet, the single most effective way to reduce your caloric intake, without paying a diet company hundreds of dollars for the hundredth time, is by taking a realistic look at our country's standard portion sizes. If you've been feeding yourself since the 1950's, you've had a chance to witness our nation super-size itself. In 1955, one bag of McDonald's fries was two and a half ounces (worth 210 calories), thirty years later it weighed in at seven ounces, worth 610 calories (without the burger and drink). A standard movie popcorn was three cups (worth 174 calories), now it's twenty one weighing in at a whopping 1700 calories. A two ounce Hershey bar (297 calories) was considered normal as we approached 1900, one century later it was seven ounces for 1000 calories.

If you are reading labels, the government label requirements for calories are as follows; "Low Calorie" means 40 calories or less per serving (and if the serving is 30 g or 2 Tbsp or less, per 50 g of the food). "Reduced Calories" means at least 25 percent fewer calories per serving than the "reference food", and "Calorie Free" means fewer than 5 calories per serving.

If you want to lose weight by going on a diet, start with the idea that "normal" may just be too big, and remember that the more you cut back on calories, the stronger the drive in the brain to make you eat more later (thus large portion sizes will look much more

appealing). You can avoid this dieting pitfall by eating smaller balanced meals more frequently through the day.

Although cutting out carbohydrates as a dieting fad has lost popularity over the past couple of years, it's been tried by almost everyone. Your brain relies on sugar to function, and simple sugar is the end result of all carbohydrate breakdown. With 26 million Americans on a Low Carb diet in the year 2004, over 1500 new or re-vamped products hit the market that year alone. Today many labels still identify "Low Carb" and many restaurants (including most major chains) still have options available if you ask. Most high fiber vegetables are a great substitute for the standard carbs in a meal ordered out, and in the aftermath of the Low Carb craze, almost every restaurant is accustomed to substituting vegetables for pasta, rice, potatoes or bread in a meal. The general rule of thumb is to simply ask your server.

Gluten sensitivity, wheat/gluten intolerance and Celiac Disease are serious and challenging issues that force food restrictions for a growing number of Americans. Commonly confused, they all dictate the same treatment; stay away from gluten.

Glutens are classes of proteins found in various crops, such as corn, wheat and potatoes, but research shows that only the glutens found in wheat, barley and rye affect people with gluten sensitivity, gluten intolerance or Celiac. Gluten is also found in texturized vegetable proteins, all foods containing gluten derivatives, such as prepared and processed foods, thickeners and fillings, and many oat products, due to contamination in processing.

Celiac Disease is an intestinal disorder where the body reacts to the protein gluten, and affects more than a half million Americans, mostly with Northwest European descent, according to Tuft's University. Gluten damages the lining of the small intestine and causes mal-absorption of critical nutrients, bloating, cramps, and vitamin and mineral deficiencies, along with other equally disturbing gastro-intestinal symptoms. Most people can be screened for Celiac with a simple blood test, and the damage to the small intestines can heal over a few months, but avoidance of all foods that contain gluten will need to be a lifetime habit.

Gluten Sensitivity also triggers the immune system, causes the formation of antibodies, and causes inflammation, but hasn't caused damage to the small intestine yet and symptoms are sometimes more mild. Wheat intolerance caused by gluten (gluten intolerance) is a difficulty digesting wheat and can cause aching joints, eczema, low blood iron levels, fatigue and gastro-intestinal problems much less obvious than gluten insensitivity or Celiac, but uncomfortable nonetheless.

Regardless of the diagnosis, learning to read labels for foods containing gluten is a must. "Wheat Free" does not mean gluten free (for example, kamut and spelt are wheat free but not gluten free foods). According to United States standards, a label claiming "gluten free" must mean no gluten or gluten containing ingredients. You can contact any food manufacturer directly if ingredients are not listed on the label. Rice, corn, buckwheat, quinoa and amaranth are all OK. When shopping for gluten free foods, head for the following markets and follow their guidelines:

Both Nature's and Newport Market in Bend have tags labeling gluten free foods, Wild Oats recommends that you ask an employee to walk you through the gluten free items in the store, Fred Meyer's has a large gluten free selection in their nutrition center, including many convenient frozen foods, and Trader Joe's has a seven page list that you can access on line identifying all gluten free products in the store, along with some label reading suggestions.

There are also many restaurants in Central Oregon that can accommodate gluten free eating. Zydeco, Cafe Yumm, Outback Steakhouse and Johnny Carino's have special gluten free menus that you can either access on line or ask for at the restaurant. Scanlon's, Greg's Grill, High Tides, Kan Pai, Kebaba and Tony's Deli can all accommodate gluten free eating if you let the server know, Pizza Mondo makes gluten free pizza on Mondays and Tuesdays, and Nancy P's makes gluten free chocolate chip cookies, peanut butter knosh and quiche. Regardless of the restaurant, always avoid standard sauces, croutons, dressings and soy sauce when eating out.

Whether you are currently on a diet or trying different ways of eating to feel better overall, you shouldn't have to sacrifice variety and taste. By reading labels, watching portion sizes and asking questions, it's easier than ever to simplify your shopping life and enjoy yourself at restaurants in Central Oregon, regardless of your food restrictions.