

North East Lincolnshire CCG

Gluten Free foods Prescribing Guidelines

Rationale

In the financial year 2014/15, NEL CCG's spend on Gluten free foods was £90k (adults and children). Current practice in NEL CCG is to allow the prescribing of gluten free staple foods (bread, flour, bread mix, pasta, cereals and crackers) up to the monthly unit allowance set out in the Coeliac UK Gluten Free foods prescribing guide. However it is evident from prescribing data that other items e.g. biscuits are also being prescribed.

Historically, availability of gluten free foods was low, therefore obtaining these products from community pharmacies via prescriptions improved access to them. However, with the increased awareness of coeliac disease and gluten sensitivity as well as a general trend towards eating less gluten, gluten free foods are now much easier and accessible to purchase. A wide and expanding range of gluten free foods are now available from supermarkets and online.

The following recommendations have been accepted by the CCG following consultation with the community forum:

- Only prescribe bread and flour on prescription
- Only obtain fresh bread from suppliers that do not have surcharges
- Ensure prescribed quantities do not exceed 6 – 8 units of bread or flour per month (depending on the age of the patient)

If these recommendations are followed the annual saving to the CCG would be in the region of £25k.

Please see actions below and if you have any queries please contact:

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Actions

Review all patients currently being prescribed gluten free products and ensure that the recommendations below are being followed. Please contact relevant patients to inform them of the changes to their current prescription for gluten-free products. A sample letter has been included (Appendix 1) and there is also a Question and answers fact sheet (Appendix 2).

1. Only Patients that meet ACBS (Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances) indication are entitled to gluten free foods on NHS (FP10) prescription

- established gluten-sensitive enteropathies including steatorrhoea due to gluten sensitivity
- coeliac disease
- dermatitis herpetiformis

2. Prescribing of gluten free bread and flour only is allowed

This will ensure patients receive a supply of staple foods on the NHS that are not only considered to be cost effective but will also contribute to reducing the cost of maintaining a gluten free diet that is incurred by the patient.

Prescribing of pasta and pizza bases is not recommended as these foods are available from supermarkets at a similar cost to their gluten containing equivalents and therefore the patient is not unfairly disadvantaged by having to purchase these foods. It is also worth noting that the cost to patients for the price of gluten free items at the supermarket is much lower than the price the NHS is charged. It is also not recommended to prescribe items considered to be treats like gluten free cakes and biscuits; this supports the national campaign for healthy eating.

3. Ensure prescribed quantities do not exceed 6-8 units of bread or flour per month (depending on the age of the patient)

Age Group	Quantity to Prescribe	Example of monthly prescription
1 to 3	6 units	6 x 400g bread or
4 to 6		3 x 500g mix suitable for making bread
7+ / adults	8 units	8 x 400g bread or 4 x 500g mix suitable for making bread
Female 75+	6 units	6 x 400g bread or 3 x 500g mix suitable for making bread

Food item available on prescription	No. of units
400g Bread / Rolls / Baguettes	1
500g flour	2

4. List of gluten-free flour products available

Multipurpose and bread mixes cost a lot more than flour products. The difference between multipurpose or bread mix over flour is that they also contain sugar and milk powder (which are normally required for the bread making process). Whilst these pre-mixed products may be more convenient the basic flour can be used to make bread as well as other items and therefore is better value and should be the first line product choice wherever possible. However, some patients may prefer the mixes to bake their own bread with, and therefore prefer a prescription for the mixes.

Product	Pack Size	NHS price (January 2016)	Cost per 500grams
Innovative Solutions Pure Brown Rice flour	500g	£1.58	£1.58
Tobia Teff flour, white or brown	1kg	£3.35	£1.68
Innovative Solutions Pure Potato starch	500g	£1.68	£1.68
Innovative Solutions Pure White Rice flour	500g	£1.68	£1.68
Innovative Pure Flour mix, blended	1kg	£4.23	£2.12
Innovative Solutions Pure Tapioca starch	500g	£2.26	£2.26
Innovative Pure Teff flour, brown or white	1kg	£4.77	£2.39
Tritamyl Flour mix, bread	1kg	£7.10	£3.55
Tritamyl Flour mix white or plain	2kg	£14.26	£3.57
Barkat Plain flour	750g	£6.98	£4.65
Finax Flour mix or coarse	900g	£8.66	£4.81
Finax Flour mix, bread, fibre Flour mix	1kg	£9.92	£4.96
Proceli. Flour mix, white	1kg	£9.95	£4.98

Glutafin Flour mix fibre or white	500g	£6.66	£6.66
Barkat Bread-Mix White	500g	£6.81	£6.81
Juvela Flour mix, fibre, harvest, plain	500g	£7.35	£7.35

*Please note this list is not exhaustive

Flours highlighted in green are the most cost effective option

5. Only obtain fresh bread from suppliers that do not charge a surcharge (See table below)

List of manufacturers of fresh gluten-free bread products that are available with no delivery charges

Company	Ordering arrangements	Telephone number
Genius – Fresh bread only	No charge if ordered directly (via Alliance wholesalers)	0845 8744 000
Juvela – Fresh bread only	Available from UDG with no delivery charge	01773 510123
Glutafin	Available from UDG with no delivery charge	01773 510123
Warburtons	Available from UDG with no delivery charge	01773 510123
Ultraparm/Lifestyle	No charge if ordered from Alliance wholesalers (Delivery charges will apply if ordered directly from Ultraparm)	08448 544983

Appendix 1: Sample letter

Dear

We are writing to inform you of North East Lincolnshire CCG change in policy regarding the prescribing of gluten free food on NHS prescription.

As part of ensuring a fair and effective use of NHS resources whilst also helping patients afford the higher cost of gluten free diets, it has been agreed that only bread and flour will be prescribed.

This decision was made in light of the following:

- With the increased awareness of coeliac disease and sensitivity to gluten, gluten free foods are now much easier and accessible to buy. A wide and expanding range of gluten free foods are now available from supermarkets and online
- Pasta and pizza bases are available from supermarkets at a similar cost to their gluten containing equivalents
- The CCG support the national campaign for healthy eating and therefore do not recommend prescribing of gluten free cakes and biscuits

Please find enclosed a question and answers fact sheet, if you have any further queries please contact your GP practice.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 2



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 everyday 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 anymore?

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 items available on prescription cost more than double the supermarket price of similar items.

Are there no 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

References

Coeliac UK website <https://www.coeliac.org.uk/home/>

BNF online <http://www.bnf.org/>

Prescipp Bulletin 69: Guidance on the prescribing of gluten-free foods
<https://www.prescipp.info/gluten-free/viewcategory/204>