

Press Release

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CHARITY WORRIED BY HAMBLETON, RICHMONDSHIRE AND WHITBY CCG'S DECISION TO CUT GLUTEN-FREE PRESCRIPTIONS

Coeliac UK is very concerned by the announcement today, 3 August 2016 by the Hambleton, Richmondshire and Whitby CCG that from 1 September all gluten-free prescriptions for people in the region who have coeliac disease will be cut.

Although the charity is pleased to learn the most vulnerable, or those in exceptional circumstances, will still be supported, it is concerned that the CCG has announced that it will only now undertake an Equality Impact Assessment. This comes after the decision to cut nearly all gluten-free prescriptions has been made, despite guidance from NHS England which requires that assessments are to be completed before a decision is made.

The charity also strongly refutes the claim regarding gluten-free products by the CCG that:

"The increase in demand has seen a reduction in cost."

Sarah Sleet, chief executive of Coeliac UK, the national charity for people with coeliac disease said: "We have proof from in depth research that the cost of key gluten-free products such as breads and flours in supermarkets has not reduced. We sent this information to the CCG but it has been ignored."

Gram for gram, gluten-free bread is six times more expensive* than regular gluten containing bread in the supermarket. Whilst other gluten-free food staples such as pasta, are three to four times more expensive than gluten-containing counterparts and availability is limited in rural areas, discount supermarkets and small stores. Having access to gluten-free staple foods on prescription provides an essential level of support to individuals trying to keep to the gluten-free diet which is the only treatment for coeliac disease.

"We would urge anyone who will be severely affected by this decision and wish to make a case for prescriptions as an exception to contact the Charity to see how we can take your case forward," continued Ms Sleet."

Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune disease caused by a reaction to gluten. When gluten (a protein found in wheat, rye and barley) is eaten, damage to the gut lining occurs. There is no cure or medication for the condition; the only treatment is a lifelong, strict gluten-free diet.

If someone with coeliac disease doesn't stick to a gluten-free diet, the disease can lead to other conditions such as malnutrition, osteoporosis and small bowel cancer.

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) estimates that the cost of gluten-free food to the NHS equates to £194.24 per diagnosed patient per year, making it an extremely low cost treatment. Last year, NHS Hambleton, Richmondshire and Whitby CCG each spent approximately £90,000 on gluten-free foods for both adults and children.

In England, prescriptions for gluten-free food are not free of charge unless someone already qualifies for free prescriptions. Currently 64% of CCGs across the country adhere to National Prescribing Guidelines, providing recommendations for GPs and policymakers on reasonable amounts of gluten-free staple foods such as bread, flour and pasta per patient per month.

Ends

For more information or interviews please contact
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Notes to editor

- Coeliac disease is a serious illness where the body's immune system reacts to gluten found in food, making the body attack itself.
- 1 in 100 people in the UK has coeliac disease
- A wide range of case studies are available on request from Coeliac UK.
- Average time to diagnosis is 13 years.
- 1 in 4 people diagnosed with coeliac disease had previously been diagnosed with IBS.
- Gluten is a protein found in wheat (including spelt), rye and barley. Some people are also sensitive to oats. Obvious sources of gluten include breads, pastas, flours, cereals, cakes and biscuits. It is often used as an ingredient in many favourite foods such as fish fingers, sausages, gravies, sauces and soy sauce.
- Coeliac UK has a Helpline on 0333 332 2033 and further information can be found at www.coeliac.org.uk

* Comparative costs for gluten-free bread and gluten containing bread as of 4 July 2016

Gluten-free loaf	Price per 100g	Price per loaf
Tesco-free from white sliced (400g)	£0.38	£1.50
Tesco-free from fresh bread (550g) (white or brown)	£0.36	£2.00
Asda free from white sliced bread (400g)	£0.38	£1.50
Asda free from brown sliced bread (550g)	£0.27	£1.50
Sainsbury's free from sliced (400g) white or brown	£0.50	£2.00

Compared to gluten containing

Gluten containing loaf	Price per 100g	Price per loaf
Tesco everyday value bread (800g) (white or brown)	£0.05	£0.40

Tesco bread (800g) (white or bread)	£0.06	£0.50
Asda Baker's Selection (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.50
Asda chosen by you (800g) wholemeal	£0.09	£0.75
Sainsbury's basics bread (800g) white or brown	£0.05	£0.40
Sainsbury's bread (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.45
Waitrose essential (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.45
Waitrose bread (800g) white or wholegrain	£0.17	£1.35

Note: for Morrison and Waitrose customers there is not an own brand gluten-free version. Genius bread (gluten-free) is available at £2.90 for a 535g loaf (£0.54 per 100g) or Warburtons gluten-free is available at £3.00 for a 560g loaf (£0.54 per 100g)