



Press Release

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**CUTS TO GLUTEN FREE PRESCRIPTIONS BY BUCKINGHAMSHIRE CCG
GOES AGAINST GOVERNMENT DECISION**

National charity Coeliac UK, is opposing the further proposed cuts to gluten free prescriptions for many patients in Buckinghamshire, which goes against the government's decision to maintain this essential support for all patients with coeliac disease.

NHS Buckinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is currently consulting with local people, not just those who would be affected by any policy change, about their views on prescribing gluten free foods in the area, with a view to removing access to gluten free bread and flour mix currently available on prescription.

The consultation runs until 11 December 2019 and the link to the online survey is: <https://www.letstalkhealthbucks.nhs.uk/consult.ti/GlutenFreePrescribing/answerQuestionnaire?qid=6013987>. The charity would like to encourage all those affected to complete the questionnaire so that their opinions are heard.

Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune condition caused by a reaction to gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. Further cuts to gluten free prescriptions may leave some patients with coeliac disease without support, which will affect their ability to stick to the gluten free diet, which is the only medical treatment for the condition. This could lead to nutritional deficiencies and ongoing health issues as well as serious long term complications, including osteoporosis, associated with non adherence to the diet.

In February 2018, following a national consultation on the *Future of Gluten Free Prescribing*, a [decision](#)¹ was announced by the Department of Health and Social Care to retain access to gluten free breads and flour mixes on prescription in England, recognising the need for ongoing support for those with coeliac disease managing a lifelong autoimmune disease with a gluten free diet.

Chief executive of Coeliac UK, Hilary Croft said: "Last year the Department of Health and Social Care listened carefully to the consultation responses around the issues of cost,

availability and nutritional contribution of gluten free staples in managing a lifelong gluten free diet. The vast majority of consultation responses from patients and clinicians agreed that access to gluten free staples is key to helping patients, keep to a gluten free diet and avoid significant health complications as a result.”

“Therefore, it is surprising and worrying that this local CCG is ignoring the government’s decision and proposing to remove all access to gluten free prescriptions for the majority of patients with coeliac disease in Buckinghamshire which could result in health inequality. We are however, pleased to see in the accompanying consultation documentation that the CCG has highlighted a number of vulnerable groups who will be considered as exceptions to the overall cuts but are still concerned that many may still be deemed exempt.”

Buckinghamshire CCG claims that around £111,000 a year could be saved by making the proposed cuts to gluten free food on prescription

Gram for gram, gluten free bread is five times more expensive than regular gluten containing bread in the supermarket. Whilst other gluten free food staples such as pasta and crackers which are not available on prescription in England are three to four times more expensive than gluten containing counterparts and availability is limited in rural areas, discount supermarkets and small stores.

“For someone medically diagnosed with coeliac disease there is no choice but to stick to a gluten free diet, day in day out for life and so access to gluten free staples is critical, and is not as easy as you might think. The expansion of Free From aisles in large supermarkets masks the reality of very patchy provision. Any reduction in the gluten free prescription services for people with coeliac disease is being based on budgets rather than patient need or clinical evidence,” continued Ms Croft.

In England, prescriptions for gluten free food are not free of charge unless someone already qualifies for free prescriptions. Currently around 60% of CCGs across the country continue to enable access to gluten free food on prescription.

Ends

For more information or interviews please contact
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¹ Availability of gluten free foods on NHS prescription - Consultation outcome:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/availability-of-gluten-free-foods-on-nhs-prescription>

Notes to editor

- Coeliac UK is based in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire

- 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