

PRESS RELEASE

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Thousands will be unable to eat out safely this Christmas

We all like to indulge at Christmas, eating in restaurants for Christmas parties and celebration dinners, but for 1 in 100 people in the UK who have coeliac disease, what should be a celebration, can leave them unable to take part in the festivities.

Concern over their gluten-free diet being catered for is a constant worry for people with coeliac disease. Lack of understanding and education in the catering sector means that mistakes often happen, leaving people with coeliac disease very ill, following what should have been an enjoyable meal out.

Coeliac UK, the national charity for people with coeliac disease and DH, is urging the hospitality industry to ensure that people with coeliac disease are able to celebrate Christmas properly by catering for their condition and tapping into the largely unexploited £100 million gluten-free market¹.

The hospitality sector could alleviate the concerns of people with coeliac disease and secure their custom with some simple adjustments to cooking practices and educating front of house staff. Research recently carried out by Coeliac UK, saw that nearly 60% of people with coeliac disease felt that establishments don't offer clear gluten-free options and they don't trust that staff know enough about preparing gluten-free food.

Sarah Sleet, Chief Executive at Coeliac UK says: "People with coeliac disease want to eat out and celebrate Christmas just like anyone else, and worrying that their Christmas dinner or office party might not be safe to eat, is a sad reality. We would like to work with the hospitality sector and help to educate about catering gluten-free as simple changes could really help to increase revenue."

Eating out is not easy for people with coeliac disease, and this worry does not just affect them, it also affects their friends and family. Nearly half of the people surveyed stated that their condition dictates where the group dines. With the majority surveyed eating out with two to three people and spending on average £10 - £20 per person, this is sector which cannot be ignored, particularly in the current financial climate.

Coeliac disease is a serious illness where the body's immune system reacts to gluten found in food, making the body attack itself. There is no cure or medication for the condition, and the only treatment is a strict life long a gluten-free diet.

Gluten is found in wheat, barley and rye, and subsequently in many Christmas favourites such as mince pies, Christmas cake, gravy and stuffing. There are good gluten-free alternatives available and simple adjustments to recipes can make delicious gluten-free dishes.

- Ends -

Tips on catering gluten-free

- If you are entertaining someone with coeliac disease this Christmas, ask them ahead of time about their requirements.
- Gluten-free bread can be used in bread sauce; gravy can be made with corn flour instead of wheat-based flour and a few suppliers offer gluten-free sausages.
- Many supermarkets now stock a range of good gluten-free products.
- Be careful to ensure that there is no cross contamination during cooking by thoroughly cleaning utensils and washing down surfaces.
- For further information and recipes, go to www.coeliac.org.uk

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Notes to editors:

1. 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.
2. The symptoms of coeliac disease range from mild to severe and can vary between individuals. Not everyone with coeliac disease experiences gut related symptoms; any area of the body can be affected.
3. Symptoms can include bloating, abdominal pain, nausea, constipation, diarrhoea, wind, tiredness, anaemia, headaches, mouth ulcers, recurrent miscarriages, weight loss (but not in all cases), skin problems, depression, joint or bone pain and nerve problems.
4. A range of case studies of men, women and children are available on request from Coeliac UK.
5. 1 in 100 people in the UK has coeliac disease, however only 12.5% of these have been diagnosed and average length of diagnosis is 13 years.
6. For more information on how to cater gluten-free, please go to www.coeliac.org.uk/cateringtoolkit or call our Helpline on 0845 305 2060.

¹ Research carried out of 3000 people with coeliac disease. December 2008.