



**Press Release**

**Immediate Issue: 1 February 2018**

**COELIAC UK WELCOMES GOVERNMENT CONTINUED SUPPORT OF KEY  
GLUTEN FREE STAPLES ON PRESCRIPTION**

Coeliac UK, the charity for people with coeliac disease, said today's (1 February 2018) [decision](#) by the Department of Health and Social Care to retain access to gluten free breads and flour mixes on prescription in England is a positive outcome for people with coeliac disease, and recognises the need for this important ongoing support in managing a lifelong autoimmune disease.

Chief executive of Coeliac UK Sarah Sleet said: "We are pleased the Department of Health and Social Care listened carefully to the consultation responses including the charity's evidence built up over many years 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, particularly the most vulnerable, keep to a gluten free diet and avoid expensive health complications as a result.

"It is clear the Department of Health and Social Care has carefully reviewed the [strong evidence base](#) that we put to them with the help of our coeliac disease community, and made the right decision regarding the treatment and care of people with coeliac disease."

The charity said the Department of Health and Social Care's decision to restrict gluten free items on prescription to just bread and flour mixes, for patients medically diagnosed with coeliac disease of all ages, was reasonable given the financial challenges faced by the NHS.

"We still have work to do to ensure the final regulations outcomes are adequate in enabling patients with coeliac disease, especially the most vulnerable, adhere to the diet and manage their condition," Ms Sleet said.

A strict gluten free diet is the only treatment for coeliac disease, a lifelong autoimmune condition where the body attacks itself when gluten is consumed. The consequences of not maintaining a strict gluten free diet are serious with complications such as malnutrition, osteoporosis, a rare type of bowel cancer, and neurological conditions [1, 2]. For children, non-adherence to the diet can have additional consequences including faltering growth and delayed puberty [3].

While the charity is pleased that the needs of coeliac disease patients are being recognised at a national level, there is still concern at the actions already taken by individual Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to withdraw gluten free food on prescription in some regions.

“As CCGs are autonomous and do not have to follow national guidance we will identify where access to prescriptions has effectively been removed and challenge those CCGs to review and reverse their actions which are certainly harder to justify in light of this decision announced by the government,” continued Ms Sleet.

“Irrespective of the Department of Health and Social Care’s decision, we continue to provide support and information on more affordable ways for people to manage their gluten free diet. With the cost of gluten free food so high, anyone needing to adhere to a gluten free diet for medical reasons can benefit from this kind of support,” Ms Sleet said.

Ends

1. NICE, NG20 Coeliac disease: recognition, assessment and management. 2015
2. Hadjivassiliou, M., et al., Dietary treatment of gluten ataxia. J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry, 2003, 74 p. 1221-24
3. Murch, S., et al., Joint BSPGHAN and Coeliac UK guidelines for the diagnosis and management of coeliac disease in children. Arch Dis Child, 2013. 98 (10): p. 806-11

#### **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](http://www.coeliac.org.uk)