



21 March 2023

**The cost of living crisis = a cost of health crisis**  
***Coeliac UK report reveals the true cost of maintaining a medically prescribed gluten free diet in the current economic climate***

As the cost of living crisis continues, many people are struggling. This has been exacerbated for people with coeliac disease, a serious autoimmune condition where the only current treatment is a medically prescribed gluten free diet.

In light of this, Coeliac UK has released its report: *The gluten free diet – How much does it cost and why does it matter?* to raise awareness of the additional challenges being faced by the coeliac community. Coeliac UK is now calling on policy makers and the food industry, to do more to ensure people with coeliac disease can access the gluten free food they need and they are asking their coeliac and gluten free community to get behind their campaign for change and pledge their support. **#GFCostPledge**

To find out more about how to get involved and pledge your support visit: [www.coeliac.org.uk/cost-gf-food](http://www.coeliac.org.uk/cost-gf-food)

The report reveals a weekly gluten free food shop can be as much as **20% more expensive** than a standard weekly food shop. A gluten free loaf of bread is on average **4.3 times more expensive** than a standard gluten containing loaf and there is even more disparity between the cheapest products, with the cheapest gluten free loaf of bread **costing 7.2 times more** than the cheapest gluten containing loaf.

When these differences are looked at on an annual basis, based on typical bread consumption, the annual cost for white and brown/seeded bread for someone on a gluten free diet compared with someone on a gluten containing diet is **£171 versus £41**.<sup>1</sup>

Consumers will also pay on average double for gluten free staple substitutes, such as crackers (2.5 times more), bread rolls (2.3 times more), plain flour (2.1 times more), pasta (1.9 times more) and cereal bars (1.8 times more).

Some have unfairly suggested people with coeliac disease just eat alternatives like rice and potatoes but it's not as simple as that. Gluten free substitute foods play a key role in replacing those gluten containing foods that are typical of the UK diet and are important for both practical reasons and their nutritional content. For instance, eating rice or potatoes instead of bread can reduce iron and calcium intake by up to 96% and 93% respectively. This is particularly important as people with coeliac disease are recommended to have a higher intake of calcium compared with the general population, due to previous or potential ongoing malabsorption.

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<sup>1</sup> Using individual bread consumption data for an adult under 65 years, taken from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey and Coeliac Disease Nutrition Survey

The report also reveals there are limited variety and budget options for all gluten free products, which puts a disproportionate burden on those with the lowest incomes which can be even greater for families with more than one person diagnosed. Higher prices for gluten free bread and staple products can have a significant impact on the cost of the weekly food shop. This would be a challenge at the best of times but in the context of a cost of living crisis, it raises concerns that many people with coeliac disease could struggle to afford their gluten free diet, the only treatment for the condition. According to the Government, the poorest 10% of the UK population normally only spends £22.45 per week on their food shopping, and when special dietary requirements are added to the mix, this makes it even more difficult to ensure a diet is adequately nutritious.

There is concern amongst the medical profession that the increased cost of gluten free options makes it much harder for those with coeliac disease to maintain the strict gluten free diet they need to manage their condition.

**Dr Jeremy Woodward, Consultant Gastroenterologist, Addenbrooke's Hospital,** said: "At a time when the cost of living is rising and people are necessarily having to identify any possible savings, the added expense of having a diagnosis of coeliac disease may become unaffordable, especially for the most disadvantaged in our society."

**Dr Peter Gillett, Consultant Paediatric Gastroenterologist at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children, Edinburgh and Chair of the Coeliac Disease Working Group, BSPGHAN** added: "With the current cost of living crisis and child poverty increasing over the last 15 years, I am extremely worried for children who are being diagnosed with the condition in that families will struggle to maintain a gluten free diet for them and the consequences of not adhering strictly will potentially not be discovered until later in life."

This cost of living crisis comes at a time when many areas of England have stopped prescribing gluten free bread and flour to those with coeliac disease, which pushes the economic burden further onto the individual or household. Coeliac UK is calling on policy makers across England to ensure no member of the coeliac community is left behind as a result.

**To find out more about our work and to view the report visit:**

[www.coeliac.org.uk/cost-gf-food](http://www.coeliac.org.uk/cost-gf-food)

**Tristan Humphreys, Head of Advocacy at Coeliac UK,** commented:

"We believe gluten free prescriptions have a critical role to play in supporting people with coeliac disease to maintain a strict gluten free diet, and we will continue to fight to protect this service.

We welcome the commitment to ongoing provision from commissioners and the devolved administrations across Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland and recognise the support offered by many Integrated Care Boards in England. However, it cannot be right that for so many others with coeliac disease living in England, access to such support is denied. Not because of need or means but by accident of geography alone.

"We're calling on policy makers and the food industry to join with us to help support those with coeliac disease and ensure they can access the food they need to treat their condition."

**Joy Whelan, Gastroenterology Advanced Practitioner (Dietetics), Shantallow Health Centre, Derry,** commented: "To consider that the cheapest gluten free loaf of bread is over seven times more expensive than the cheapest gluten containing loaf is shocking.

It is important that food industries work on ways to achieve improved affordability but also essential that the health service's supply of prescribable products continue to help people manage their medical condition".

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## **Notes to Editors**

### **About *The gluten free diet – How much does it cost and why does it matter?* report**

- Coeliac UK undertook research to compare the online prices of gluten free products. The analysis included data sourced from seven different supermarket websites but only five of these provided sufficient information beyond examining the cost of bread; for the range of substitute products and the weekly food shop, five supermarkets were used.
- The research was completed between March – December 2022
- Historical data from a previous Coeliac UK costing project was also used
- To calculate the impact on a weekly shop, Coeliac UK adapted Loughborough University's Centre for Research in Social Policy's food shopping basket and collected data from five supermarkets on 11 October 2022
- BSPGHAN – British Society of Paediatric Gastroenterology, Hepatology and Nutrition
- Coeliac disease is estimated to affect 1 in 100 people in the general population of the UK, however for first degree relatives of a person diagnosed with coeliac disease the risk increases to 1 in 10.

### **About Coeliac UK:**

For over 50 years, Coeliac UK has been the expert on coeliac disease and the gluten free diet. We are an independent charity helping people living without gluten to live happier, healthier lives. We do this by providing trustworthy advice and support, funding critical research into coeliac disease, working with healthcare professionals to improve diagnosis and fighting for better availability of gluten free food. And we do it all so that one day, no one's life will be limited by gluten.

For more information visit: [www.coeliac.org.uk](http://www.coeliac.org.uk)

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Twitter: @Coeliac\_UK

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