

MEDIA RELEASE
CANADIAN CELIAC ASSOCIATION

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Finding gluten-free foods just got a whole lot safer!

Three million Canadians with celiac disease and gluten sensitivity will be safer on August 4th when new federal legislation on food labeling comes into effect. Improvements in the federal Food Allergen Labeling Regulations will require that food products containing gluten, or any of the ten priority allergens, must clearly state this on the label. Wheat is the primary source of gluten in foods and an autoimmune reaction to gluten damages the absorptive surface of the small intestine in individuals with celiac disease and adversely affects others who have gluten sensitivity. More information on how to read the new labels can be found at www.celiac.ca.

"Now shopping for groceries will no longer be such a guessing game," said Janet Dalziel, Past-President of the Canadian Celiac Association (CCA). "Better food labeling to protect people with celiac disease and gluten sensitivity has been a longstanding goal of our organization."

Almost 1% of Canadians have celiac disease and an estimated 6% are gluten sensitive. Celiac disease is a genetic disorder which requires a complete gluten-free diet for life. The ingestion of gluten can cause anemia, nutritional deficiencies, a blistering skin rash, and an increased risk of other autoimmune diseases such as Type 1 diabetes. It can also lead to some cancers of the gut.

The critical problem for people with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity is that they cannot always tell whether or not gluten is present in foods they eat. In a 2009 study of approximately 7,000 individuals conducted by Health Canada in collaboration with the Canadian Celiac Association, 96.1% of respondents reported that they read every ingredient on all pre-packaged products to determine whether the product contains gluten. In the same survey, 78.9% of

respondents identified that their greatest difficulty was with incomplete labeling. Knowing whether specific allergens are in the food we consume is not a shopping convenience; it can be a matter of life and death.

Now that risk has been substantially reduced. These improvements in labeling will also help to reduce the estimated 14,000 annual visits to emergency hospital wards caused by allergic/gluten reactions and the projected \$5 million in health care costs that are incurred as a result of these visits.

The Canadian Celiac Association is the national voice for people who are adversely affected by gluten, and is dedicated to improving diagnosis and quality of life. The Canadian Celiac Association has worked closely with Health Canada, the Fondation québécoise de la maladie coeliaque (www.fqmc.org), Anaphylaxis Canada (www.anaphylaxis.ca), and other organizations to bring about these labeling improvements.

We thank the Members of Parliament who have been vocal on this issue, the professionalism of Health Canada, and the support of leaders within the industrial sector and the gluten-free community, all of whom have been instrumental in achieving these important changes. All Canadians have a right to know if there is an ingredient in their foods or beverages which can harm them. On August 4th, exercising that right just got safer.

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www.celiac.ca