

# HOW TO ORDER A SAFE GLUTEN FREE MEAL

By Ellen Bayens (The Celiac Scene)



I am very pleased to offer your readers a list of questions that I call, 'Starting the Conversation on Celiac Friendly Dining®. I was pleased to present them as a speaker at the 2021 National Conference and am honoured that they form the basis of Celiac Canada's Dining Out Page. It may surprise you that this exhaustive list was borne out of my own fear of dining out.

When I was diagnosed in 2001, I undertook to learn to read labels for myself and prepare meals at home at the same time that I was preparing meals for my gluten-eating family. How could I possibly trust a restaurant to know everything that I had just learned and more importantly, prevent cross-contamination in a busy, sometimes cramped kitchen setting?

As a volunteer for the Victoria Chapter of Celiac Canada, I began visiting the handful of Victoria restaurants that enjoyed a reputation for serving delicious but most of all safe, gluten-free meals. I soon learned what made them so good at what they had been doing for our community. Readers who attended the 2008 National Conference may remember the 'Gluten-Free Map of Victoria' they received, and the signs in restaurant windows that identified them as having been 'Chapter Approved.' That guide went on to form the foundation of what would become The Celiac Scene!

As I ventured throughout Victoria to interview restaurants who were promoting 'gluten-free, gluten-aware, gluten-friendly, celiac-friendly et al' meals, I had the opportunity to speak to owners and chefs alike and very often, tour their kitchens. What I observed at times was reassuring or so upsetting that I once had to be escorted off the premises. I have literally heard - and seen it all!

Please use this list as your starting point for those very important conversations you will learn to have with restaurants. With practice, it is possible to negotiate a celiac-safe meal almost anywhere you go! Consider this list your 'License to Dine - Gluten Free!'

## HOW TO ORDER A GLUTEN-FREE MEAL

Communication is the key ingredient to every successful gluten-free restaurant meal. When diners, chefs and servers are able to collaborate on what is required and what can be reasonably delivered, there is cause for celebration!

The following is a list of suggested questions to help Start the Conversation on Celiac-Friendly Dining®. In very short order, the responses you receive will allow you to gauge any given restaurant's degree of gluten awareness – and willingness. For the very best outcome, call ahead or take your host or server aside before ordering.

**NOTE:** Restaurants that have carefully researched how to serve us love going into detail. If your questions are met with impatience and exasperation – go with your gut. When restaurants get gluten free right, reward them generously!

## HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION!

"Can you tell me about the meals that you recommend to diners who need to eat gluten free?"

## ASK ABOUT INGREDIENTS

- What ingredients will be used to make my order?
- How do staff know whether ingredients are really gluten free? Says so on labels? Checked product website? Called the manufacturer?
- Will pure spices, prepared seasonings or soy sauce made from wheat be used to make my meal?
- What other food items are cooked in the oil that 'gluten-free' items are cooked in?
- How are sauces and dressings thickened?

## ASK ABOUT PROCEDURES

- How will my server communicate with the kitchen that a gluten-free order has been placed?
- How are gluten-free orders prepared in relation to the regular flow of the kitchen?
- Will staff wash their hands / change gloves / change aprons clean surfaces before preparing my order?
- Will fresh toppings be used to dress my order?
- How do staff ensure that all utensils used in preparing my food are free from any trace of gluten?
- Separate or scrubbed frying pan? Griddle scrubbed? Aluminum foil barrier? Dedicated pots? Dedicated colanders?
- What other precautions do staff take to minimize / prevent cross contamination?
- How will my server confirm with the kitchen that the order they are collecting has been prepared gluten free?
- How will my server confirm that the order they are delivering to me is gluten free?

## WHAT TO ASK AT PIZZA RESTAURANTS



## How to Order a Safe Gluten Free Meal (Continued)

- Are pre-made 'gluten-free' crusts purchased from a dedicated gluten-free manufacturer? Who is the manufacturer?
- Are 'gluten-free' crusts prepared on-site? During regular operations? Before regular production? During downtimes / days?
- How are gluten-free sauces and toppings prepared? During regular operations? Before regular production? During downtimes / days?
- How do staff ensure that all utensils and surfaces used in preparing gluten-free orders are free of any trace of gluten?
- How will my order be protected from airborne cross-contamination with gluten once it has been prepared and/or while waiting to be served?

The Celiac Scene™ is your premier resource for fabulous gluten-free living in Victoria, Vancouver Island & the Gulf Islands. Owned & operated by celiacs, we guide you to the restaurants we trust and the local gluten-free products we love! We even tell you where to purchase them, at the very best prices. The Celiac Scene is your gateway to Gluten-Free Paradise! [www.theceliacscene.com](http://www.theceliacscene.com)  
[@theceliacscene](https://www.instagram.com/theceliacscene)

Thank you so much Ellen for this wonderful article - so much food for thought and great advice. Listen to Sue Jennett interview Ellen on this very topic

<https://acanadianceliacpodcast.libsyn.com/ep-266-restaurant-safe-dining-with-ellen-bayens> Are you hungry for more information?

<https://theceliacscene.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Dining-Out-Gluten-Free-CCA2021.pdf>

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