





FAQs about Third Party Certification of Gluten-Free Foods

KEY POINTS:

- Third party gluten-free certification is a process designed to ensure that strict gluten-free standards are met in the testing and production process of labeled foods, beverages, or supplements
- Manufacturers can choose to hire a third-party to oversee and confirm the accuracy of their gluten-free processes and claims. This type of certification is voluntary.
- There are several organizations in North America that certify foods as gluten-free, including Beyond Celiac, Canadian Celiac Association, Gluten Intolerance Group and the National Celiac Association.
- These groups differ from one another in the criteria they use for certifying products.^{1,2,3,4}

Q: Do these groups have different criteria from the FDA labeling rule for gluten-free foods?

- Certifying criteria of some groups may be stricter than the FDA's rules for labeling food gluten-free¹. Others may follow similar guidelines to the FDA. For example:

	Beyond Celiac endorses the Gluten-Free Certification Program. Gluten-free products carrying the Beyond Celiac trademark should contain <20 parts per million (ppm) of gluten. ¹
	The Canadian Celiac Association endorses the Gluten-Free Certification Program. Gluten-free products carrying the Canadian Celiac Association trademark should contain <20ppm of gluten. ²
	Gluten-free products certified by the Gluten Intolerance Group should contain 10 ppm or less of gluten. ³
	Gluten-free products certified by the National Celiac Association should contain <5 ppm of gluten. ⁴

Q: Are certified foods safer for me than other foods that are just labeled gluten-free? Which certification is best?

- Foods with specialty certification may provide you with added confidence in the gluten-free foods you buy. **However, this does not mean that foods that do not have certifications are unsafe to eat.**
- Foods certified by the Canadian Celiac Association, Gluten Intolerance Group or Beyond Celiac do not necessarily contain a higher proportion of gluten than foods certified by the National Celiac Association.
- In addition, a food that is NOT certified by any organization does not necessarily contain a higher proportion of gluten than foods that are certified.⁵
- Many labeled gluten-free products that do not have any specialty certification are testing below 5 ppm of gluten.⁵
- In short, it is **not necessary** to limit yourself to only certified gluten-free foods.

Q: What is the difference between a certification symbol and a symbol used by a company to indicate their particular product is gluten-free?

- There are many other gluten-free “symbols” that you may see on product packaging that are NOT certification symbols. These symbols are used by manufacturers to alert customers that particular products are gluten-free.

Q: I read that some packages of naturally gluten-free grains and beans are contaminated with gluten. Is this true?

- **Unless they are labeled gluten-free**, lentils and other legumes (chick peas, soybeans, etc.) are allowed by law to contain a certain percentage of foreign grain, including wheat, barley, and/or rye.
- Wheat, barley, and rye have been appearing in some packages of naturally gluten-free grains, seeds, and legumes, including millet grain and dried lentils, per Gluten Free Watchdog, a gluten test reporting service. **This cross-contact is likely occurring during harvest, storage, and transport. Unfortunately, gluten-containing grains have been found in some products labeled “gluten-free” as well as in some labeled “certified**

gluten-free.” Some of the food manufacturing plants are also dedicated gluten-free.⁵

- Please read this article about one strategy to address the problem and Gluten Free Watchdog’s opinion.
<https://www.glutenfreewatchdog.org/news/it-isnt-just-oats-that-have-gluten-cross-contact-issues/>

Q: How can I be sure the beans or grains I’m buying are safe?

- Always buy naturally gluten-free grains **labeled gluten-free** (with the exception of plain rice). You may also choose to buy certified gluten-free grains.
- Whether the lentils and other legumes you buy are labeled gluten-free or not, rinse canned ones thoroughly under running water. Pour dry legumes onto a cookie sheet, pick through them, and then rinse thoroughly under running water.⁶
- Consider visiting Gluten Free Watchdog to stay updated on cross-contact and product testing.

References:

1. Beyond Celiac Gluten-Free Certification.
<https://www.beyondceliac.org/gluten-free-certification/>. Accessed July 23, 2018.
2. Canadian Celiac Association. Gluten-Free Certification Program.
http://www.celiac.ca/b/?page_id=977. Accessed January 23, 2018.
3. Gluten Intolerance Group Gluten-Free Certification Organization.
<http://www.gfco.org/certified-directory/manufacturersproviders-of-certified-products/>. Accessed January 23, 2018.
4. National Celiac Association Gluten-Free Recognition Seal Program.
<https://www.nationalceliac.org/resources/gluten-free-recognition-seal-program/>. Accessed January 23, 2018.
5. Gluten Free Watchdog. It isn’t just oats that have gluten cross-contact issues. June 7 2018. <https://www.glutenfreewatchdog.org/news/it-isnt-just-oats-that-have-gluten-cross-contact-issues>. Accessed July 19, 2018.
6. Gluten Free Watchdog. General Product Warning: check your lentils including certified gluten-free lentils for foreign grain. December 13, 2016. <https://www.glutenfreewatchdog.org/news/general-product-warning-check-your-lentilsincluding-certified-gluten-free-lentils-for-foreign-grain>. Accessed July 19, 2018.

Revised July 25, 2018

Author: Melinda Dennis, MS, RDN, LD

Editors: Amy Keller, MS, RDN, LD and Rupa Mukherjee, MD

Original Authors: Tricia Thompson

Editors: Melinda Dennis, MS, RD, LDN and Daniel Leffler, MD, MS; 8-29-12