

Catholicism and the Gluten-Free Diet

Key Points

- With major Christian Holidays such as Easter, Christmas, and Catholic Feast Days like Ascension Thursday and the Immaculate Conception, there is an obligation to attend Mass and typically receive Holy Communion.
 - For the non-Catholic, a pure gluten-free (without wheat) communion wafer (rice, potato based) may be used and is available from www.ener-g.com.¹ The Cavanagh Company, www.CavanaghCo.com is a wholesale distributor of gluten-free, wheat-free wafers (bean flour, sorghum, tapioca, potato based).^{2,3}
 - Canon Law stipulates that Holy Communion is to be given in the form of only bread or both bread and wine, or only wine, as necessary. Upon consecration, the whole presence of Christ exists in either form. Any of these forms are allowed for celiac disease (CD), particularly the wine (or alternate as described below) regardless of it being offered to the rest of the parish.⁴
 - Justification for communion wafers containing wheat dates back to Jesus' Last Supper. The church believes it has no authority to change the tradition which Jesus Himself established.⁵
 - Specific considerations are made for those unable to consume gluten for Holy Communion.
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What companies supply wheat containing, gluten-modified wafers compliant with both the FDA gluten free food labeling rule and the Catholic Church (Canon Law)?

- All test <20 ppm gluten which indicates compliance with the FDA gluten-free food labeling rule.⁶
- Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, www.benedictinesisters.org, Low Gluten Wafers (made of wheat starch, water)^{7,8}
- Parish Crossroad, www.parishcrossroads.com. Low Gluten Wafers (made of wheat starch, water)^{9,10}
- GlutenFreeHosts.com, www.glutenfreehosts.com. Gluten Free Wafers (made of wheat with gluten removed, water)^{11,12}

- Cavanagh Company, www.CavanaghCo.com. Wholesale distributor only. Low Gluten Wafers (made of wheat, water)^{2,3}
- NOTE: Wafers labeled “low gluten” easily distinguish for clergy that the requirements for wheat have been fulfilled. The layperson can recognize the use of modified wheat and make an informed decision as to the form of Holy Communion he/she prefers.¹⁰ NOTE: the remaining gluten content in the above labeled wafers is negligible and considered safe on the gluten-free diet (GFD), according to the FDA.⁶
- The form of Holy Communion one chooses is a personal choice. If you plan to use the gluten-modified wafers, discuss the issue with your doctor and notify your health care team.

What considerations should I make to initiate the reception of Holy Communion?

- The communicant (one receiving communion) must verbally notify clergy of his/her medical need for an alternative for communion. No written proof is necessary. This accommodation is automatically, permanently available.
- Contact your pastor. Identify yourself as having CD and needing special medical accommodations for communion.
- Ask if the pastor is familiar with this requirement and if a procedure is already in place.
- There is no one established procedure for accommodating your needs. The procedure chosen may depend on the preferences and dynamics of your pastor, the parish, and you.

You may buy your own wafers from any of the above suppliers and bring one in a personal pyx to Mass. It is advised to check the pastor’s preference first as he may prefer the parish purchases. The pastor receives the wafers and directly oversees all handling.

Consecrated wheat –containing, gluten-modified communion wafers (hosts) approved by the Catholic Church may be kept in a separate pyx inside the tabernacle to allow for more spontaneity. (A pyx is a container used for carrying hosts) You may arrive for Mass at the time of your choice and inform the presiding priest moments before Mass begins.

- The Catholic Church has allowed for a small amount of the regular standard wheat-containing host to be received as communion. However, this is not encouraged for people with CD.¹³
- In the uncommon event that the Catholic Church approved the wheat-containing, low gluten (labeled) communion wafer or the wheat-containing, gluten-free (labeled) ones are not acceptable, wine alone may be used regardless of it being available to the entire parish.⁴
- If wine (even in the case of a sip) is unacceptable, special accommodations are also allowed for those who, for any reason, are alcohol intolerant.

- Celiac disease can cause elevated liver enzymes. If your doctor recommends avoiding alcohol because of liver concerns, special accommodations may be needed.
- Mustum may replace wine. Mustum is grape juice with the fermentation process suspended, resulting in very low alcohol content, usually less than 1.0%.⁴
- If neither bread nor wine nor mustum are options, you may wish to partake in a spiritual communion. This type of communion is made when one intensely desires to receive Jesus through the Blessed Sacrament and embrace Him as if it actually did occur.¹⁴
- You may enter the communion line with either your hands in a praying position or crossed over your chest, with your head tilted down, gesturing to receive only a blessing from the priest.

How can cross contact be minimized from the regular wheat wafers?

- Special care should be taken to prevent cross-contact between the regular standard wheat-containing wafers and wheat-containing, gluten-modified ones approved by the Catholic Church, the wine (without the consecrated regular standard wheat host in the chalice), and the mustum. The form used to accommodate for gluten free Holy Communion should be stored, handled, and distributed separately from the regular standard wheat wafers.⁷
- Ideally, 1 person (priest or Extraordinary Minister) should distribute gluten-free communion at a particular time.⁷
- The communicant may receive communion before all others.

How can I receive Holy Communion in a different parish or while traveling?

- In advance, contact the pastor of the parish you plan to attend and discuss options for Holy Communion for the anticipated Mass time. Ask about the method(s) that may already be in place in that given parish.
- Obtain your own pyx (sold at Catholic religious stores) to carry your own communion wafer(s). Arrange to have a wafer contained within the pyx to be consecrated on the altar and administered to you.
- Take advantage of Parish Crossroads wafers available in travel-pack form, individually wrapped, with proof of authenticity with each one.⁹

References:

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