

Korean Dining: Gluten-Free

There are many ways to make your dining out experiences safe and enjoyable. Remember to always understand the menu, make special requests, and ask the wait staff questions.

When dining out at Korean restaurants, what are some common menu items and how can you order them gluten-free?

Bulgogi: Thinly sliced beef made in a savory sweet sauce, typically served with banchan, kimchi, and rice. The meat and toppings are often eaten in a lettuce wrap.

- ✓ The marinade for the beef is often made with soy sauce. Ensure that gluten-free soy sauce is being used.

Bibimbap: This means “mixed rice.” Rice, meat, fried egg, with various fresh and fermented vegetables.

- ✓ Bibimbap is often made with gochujang, a spicy paste which can contain wheat or barley. Ask your restaurant to use a gluten-free gochujang or ask for a chili sauce alternative.

Korean BBQ: In some Korean restaurants, you can cook your own meat and vegetables at the tableside!

- ✓ Make sure the cooktop is thoroughly cleaned. Some of the Korean BBQ meats are marinated in gluten-containing sauces. Request the un-marinated meats and a gluten-free sauce, like sesame garlic sauce, for added flavor.

Cucumber Salad: Cucumber, rice vinegar, sugar, Korean chili powder, sesame seeds, sesame oil, and green onion.

- ✓ Avoid if made with soy sauce.
- ✓ Ensure the rice vinegar is not seasoned rice vinegar. Plain rice vinegar is gluten-free.

Kimchi: A staple in Korean dishes. Made with Napa cabbage, carrots, daikon radish, ginger, garlic, onion, Korean chili flakes, sugar, and fish sauce.

- ✓ Gochujang, which can contain wheat or barley, may be used in place of Korean chili flakes. Ensure gochujang was not used.

When dining at a Korean restaurant, it is important to be aware of hidden sources of gluten. Some dishes and sauces contain soy sauce and gochujang (a spicy paste used in Korean cooking), which are made with wheat or barley (unless they are labeled gluten-free).

Noodles: A popular noodle used in Korean dishes is Dangmyeon, made from sweet potato starch. However, there are other popular noodles made from wheat including Guksu, Kalguksu, and Ramyeon. Only select noodles made with 100% sweet potato starch, 100% buckwheat flour, or 100% rice flour if you can ensure they are labeled gluten-free.

Dishes/Ingredients to Avoid or Request a Gluten-Free Substitution:

Avoid: soy sauce (unless labeled gluten-free), gochujang (unless labeled gluten-free); Korean fried chicken coated in wheat flour and other noodles made of wheat. Ask if the dish has been prepared on a clean surface, in a clean pan, using fresh utensils. Ask for the specific ingredients used in each dish. Though cornstarch is generally used as a thickening agent for sauces, ask if wheat flour has been used. Check to make sure that there is no wheat flour in other spices used.

To avoid gluten, choose simply prepared dishes, such as steamed vegetables, poultry, meat, seafood, or tofu. Ask questions about how the food is prepared, and make sure that there are no hidden sources of gluten added to the dish. Make sure that the food is prepared on a clean surface, and cooked in a clean pan. Bring your own gluten-free soy sauce or other gluten-free sauces to add flavor to the dish.

Always identify your needs. Consider carrying a [gluten-free restaurant card](#) in different languages or a [gluten-free restaurant card in English](#).

Bring your own salad dressing or dessert with you to the restaurant.

If a utensil, preparation area, or cooking surface is used for foods that must be avoided, ask for it to be cleaned before cooking your meal. To be safe, ask staff to use disposable tin foil.
