



Do you want a bun with that?

An influx of gluten-free items is hitting menus everywhere

BY JENNIFER HARRIS

The increasing market for gluten-free foods has been a staggering trend to watch since 2010, and it isn't showing signs of slowing down—rather, it's gaining more traction. Whether out of necessity or by choice, the demand for gluten-free products continues to grow, leading to sightings everywhere, including convenience stores, movies, event and sports venues, airports and airplanes, hotels, vending machines and menus.

Most commonly, replacement products like sandwich bread, hamburger and hot dog buns, hoagie rolls, pizza crusts, breakfast sandwiches and desserts are being added to offerings on

college campuses and in fast-casual restaurants where consumers long for the same dining experience as everyone else. Being able to enjoy a burger on a bun, a sandwich, a pizza or a brownie brings with it a feeling of normalcy that most people take for granted.

SUBSTITUTES

These bread substitutes and dessert options are ideal for the "hurry up and make it now" atmosphere at fast-casual restaurants because they arrive individually wrapped and precut with heating instructions. They are kept frozen until needed so they don't become food

waste. Heating takes place in a dedicated toaster oven or microwave or on a piece of foil that keeps the food from coming into direct contact with a contaminated surface.

The quality of foodservice products has come a long way in the past five years. Companies have created items that meet the high standards of restaurants (and chefs) by reducing allergens, improving texture and addressing nutrition.

This segment of the restaurant industry is finally getting it. Gluten free isn't a passing fad diet, as first thought. And these establishments have done their homework by

choosing an option that works with their current kitchen setup and limitations. For example, Chick-fil-A kitchens do not have microwaves, so the hamburger buns, created to their specifications, must be thawed prior to use. They can't be heated for risk of cross-contamination, so they are served sealed for guests to assemble themselves.

Others have begun testing gluten-free products to gather consumer feedback before taking the next step. Jersey Mike's tested two different hoagie rolls before deciding that the one made by Udi's Gluten Free was the best fit. Menu additions are being met with overwhelmingly positive feedback, with guests expressing appreciation for being able to enjoy a full meal. The upcharges for gluten-free substitutes vary from \$1 to \$3 depending on the restaurant.

KEEPING IT GLUTEN FREE

Many restaurants, though not all, have gone the extra mile to create safe handling procedures to keep the products free from contact with wheat through preparation. This crucial step is one that should not be ignored by restaurants. If they are putting gluten-free items on a menu, the goal should be to keep them gluten free.

TRAINING

Thoroughly training employees on the proper handling of gluten-free food is the key to implementing such menu additions and providing an enjoyable customer experience. Draft safe handling procedures that are posted in production areas and hold meetings when new products arrive to educate employees. If foodservice workers don't know

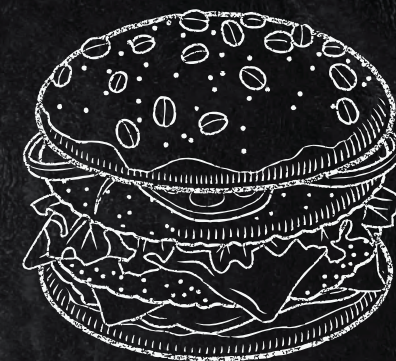
how to handle gluten-free items, customers probably aren't going to risk coming back.

KEEP ASKING QUESTIONS

No matter how thoroughly a restaurant trains its employees, there is a high turnover rate in the restaurant industry, so don't be afraid to ask questions, especially if you don't see an employee change their gloves before starting your order, use dedicated utensils or heat your food in a dedicated appliance.

Support those establishments that take care to keep gluten-free products safe, and understand the limitations of those that can't. **GF**

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2017 Gluten-Free Menu Additions

January

◆ Shake Shack began offering Bell-lyrite Foods, Inc., hamburger buns for a \$1 upcharge nationwide (except in stadiums).

and reduced-fat white cheddar cheese on a gluten-free roll. It is prepared in a certified gluten-free environment and heated in a sealed oven-safe parchment bag to prevent cross-contamination.

March

◆ Starbucks added gluten-free snacks to its lineup at 7,900 stores nationwide, including Goodie Girl Cookies' Mint Slims in new grab-and-go packaging, Country Archer Jerky's Hickory Smoke Turkey Jerky and Original Beef Jerky, and Bissinger's Dark Chocolate + Sea Salt Mini Chocolates.

◆ Starbucks also added gluten-free smoked Canadian bacon breakfast sandwiches to its menu. The sandwich features cherrywood-smoked Canadian bacon, a peppered egg patty

June

◆ After successful tests in Washington, Idaho and Mississippi in 2016, Chick-fil-A added gluten-free buns to its menu. Made with a blend of ancient grains like quinoa, sorghum, amaranth, millet and teff, the certified gluten-free bun is an extra \$1.15 and is enriched with vitamins and minerals. The buns are individually wrapped and stored frozen. Once thawed, each bun is served sealed alongside a container with grilled chicken and condiments for guests to assemble.

July

◆ Johnny Rockets started serving its certified Angus beef burgers on Udi's Gluten Free hamburger buns nationwide.

◆ Papa John's added gluten-free crust made with ancient grains to its menu nationwide, but warned it isn't safe for those with celiac because of cross-contamination with wheat during preparation. No attempts are made to use separate ingredients, dedicated utensils, etc.

◆ Subway added made-without-gluten bread to 12 pilot locations in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. The sub bread is roughly the size of a 6-inch sub, costs an extra \$1 and tests at under 20 parts per million of gluten.

It arrives frozen, pre-sliced and individually wrapped. It goes into the freezer and is thawed in the cooler for 12 hours before serving. Shared ingredients are used to prepare sandwiches, making cross-contamination a concern.

December

◆ Jersey Mike's introduced Udi's Gluten Free sub rolls at all 1,300-plus U.S. locations. Customers can order a giant or regular-size sandwich. The gluten-free sub roll can be used for most hot or cold subs on the menu because many sandwich varieties don't contain gluten. Giant-size sandwiches cost \$3 to \$4 extra, with a regular-size offering (made on a giant roll that has been cut down with a clean knife) about \$1 to \$2 more.