

The Canadian Celiac Association Labelling Survey Reveals Significant Challenges For Individuals On A Gluten-Free Diet



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Background

Reading ingredient lists and labelling claims are essential to determine the safety of foods for individuals on a gluten-free diet (GFD). The complexities of food labelling, how manufacturers convey gluten contamination risk and what appears on product packages can be challenging for consumers to understand and make informed safe choices.

Objective

The Canadian Celiac Association (CCA) conducted an online labelling survey to gauge understanding about precautionary statements (PS) and other claims on labels for those with celiac disease (CD), not diagnosed with CD who follow a GFD, caregivers/parents and dietitians.

Methods

The survey was sent to Canadians who follow or subscribe to communications of the CCA including CCA's website and social media channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and LinkedIn. RDs were contacted from a CCA database and through a Facebook group. Various scenarios were presented to ascertain whether the respondent considered it safe to consume specific inherently gluten-free (GF) grains, flours, nuts, seeds, pulses and packaged products with a GF claim or no GF claim and/or a PS for gluten. Respondents were also asked about risk level for different PS.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the data.

Survey Respondents

Respondents (N= 2346)

1. Diagnosed with celiac disease (CD) following a GFD N= 1830 (78%)
2. Not diagnosed with CD following a GFD N=141 (6%)
3. Parent/Caregiver of someone with CD following a GFD N= 342 (15%)
4. Dietitians N= 33 (1%)

Table 1: Respondent recommends or would consume products with a precautionary label

	Celiac Disease	Follow GFD	Parent/Caregiver	Dietitian
Total Number	1821	141	342	33
May Contain Statement for Wheat	%	%	%	%
Yes	5	6	4	6
No	77	67	83	79
Depends on product	19	27	14	15
Made on Shared Equipment with Wheat	%	%	%	%
Yes	3	9	3	3
No	81	72	89	88
Depends on product	16	20	8	9
Made in facility that processes wheat	%	%	%	%
Yes	11	16	10	6
No	56	50	64	67
Depends on product	33	34	27	27
May contain wheat but product also has Gluten-Free claim	%	%	%	%
Yes	13	14	16	27
No	65	63	67	64
Depends on product	22	23	17	9

Results

Table 2: Safe to consume pulses/rice with NO gluten-free claim and NO gluten containing ingredients declared in the ingredient list or "Contains" statement.

A – No precautionary statement
B – Precautionary statement present

	Celiac Disease		Follow GFD		Parent/Caregiver		Dietitian	
	A (%)	B (%)	A (%)	B (%)	A (%)	B (%)	A (%)	B (%)
Lentils	79	21	75	29	78	16	97	46
Beans	83	25	78	34	83	18	97	46
Dried Peas	79	23	75	33	79	18	97	46
Rice	89	28	85	40	88	20	97	24
Wild Rice	84	24	76	31	85	17	97	24

Table 3: Safe to consume a product with NO gluten-free claim and NO gluten containing ingredients declared in the ingredients list or "Contains" statement but has a Precautionary Statement for a gluten containing ingredient.

	Celiac Disease	Follow GFD	Parent/Caregiver	Dietitian
	%	%	%	%
Nuts	21	35	14	18
Cereals	6	6	4	3
Crackers	6	10	4	6
Snack foods	10	9	7	9
Deli meats	10	14	7	6
Candies	13	16	1	12
Chocolates	16	25	1	9
Salad dressing	13	16	9	9
Sauces	10	14	8	6
Soups	8	14	6	9
Spices	15	22	10	18
Drink Mixes	9	14	7	12
Herbal Teas	15	28	12	18

Survey Comments

- 845/2346 (36%) of respondents provided written comments
- Wide range of comments/concerns especially PS, GF claims, GF certification, time spent on contacting companies about labelling claims, production practices and gluten testing
- Health depends on consistent, clear and not misleading labelling
- Stricter regulations for PS
- DO NOT allow PS for gluten on products with GF claim
- Want more products with GF claim and/or certification

Conclusions

Individuals following a GFD face significant challenges when making safe food choices.

Unclear labels create confusion when purchasing products.

Government regulatory agencies need to provide more guidance on the use of precautionary statements and other labelling claims about gluten.