

Prescribing of gluten free food: Questions and answers

What changes have been made in relation to the prescribing of gluten free foods?

For the past 30 years the NHS has prescribed gluten free foods to patients who have been diagnosed with coeliac disease, a service that was provided when gluten free foods weren't readily available.

Until recently, patients with coeliac disease who were registered with GP practices in Chorley, South Ribble and Greater Preston could still be prescribed gluten free bread and flour.

Following an engagement exercise with patients and GPs, the decision was made to stop funding the prescribing of all gluten free food, which came into effect on 5 December.

Why have you stopped prescribing gluten free products?

The reason for this is that in recent years the variety and accessibility of gluten free products has both improved and increased, which means that as well as being of a higher quality, they are also not as expensive as they once were.

Unfortunately the NHS still gets charged more than double the price for gluten free items than people can buy them for in supermarkets, making them more expensive when provided by prescription than when purchased directly by patients in shops. The reason for the NHS being charged so much for these products is unclear, but it is a big part of what makes them an inefficient use of already limited NHS resources.

Almost £200,000 is spent on the prescribing of gluten free products annually.

Why has this been chosen as a change to help the local NHS save money?

Because gluten free products don't actually need to be prescribed for clinical reasons (for example, they are not products that can only be given following a clinical assessment or diagnosis), they come under the banner of 'low priority' prescribing.

Other 'low priority prescribing' items include other products and medicines that are also readily available on shop shelves or over the counter in pharmacies, such as paracetamol, cold and flu treatments, head lice lotion, moisturisers or hay fever remedies.

What if I don't currently pay for prescriptions and can't afford this change?

The NHS supported the supply of gluten free foods on prescription at a time when it was much more expensive for people to buy by any other means. Now this gap in price is significantly reduced, the NHS considers gluten free food to be comparable to the supply of other foods.

I have purchased a prescription pre-payment certificate specifically for gluten free food – can I get a refund?

Your local CCG will reimburse prescription prepayment certificates where these have been purchased by patients for the sole purpose of obtaining gluten-free food on prescription. If this is the case, please contact the customer care team on 01772 214601.

Where can I get advice or support about coeliac disease or gluten free food?

You can find a wealth of information about coeliac disease, its symptoms and its causes on the NHS Choices website and search 'coeliac': www.nhs.uk.

Coeliac UK also has a wide range of information and support on offer: www.coeliac.org.uk.