

Gluten free food on prescription - Q&A

Why have you stopped prescribing gluten free foods?

Demand for NHS services continues to increase. Therefore we need to look at everything we do to ensure the NHS locally uses its funding appropriately and fairly.

In June and July 2018, the CCGs underwent a six-week consultation on the provision of gluten free foods on prescription. The consultation asked patients and local people to give their opinions on the continued prescribing of these products.

The consultation was available online and displayed in GP Practices across Greater Nottingham. Key local and national organisations were informed and asked to share the consultation information. Engagement events were also held over the six-week period.

Feedback from this consultation was considered by the partnership's Joint Commissioning Committee (made up of GPs and CCG senior staff) in September 2018. It was considered alongside a set of potential options. At this meeting, the committee members decided to implement proposals which mean that gluten free products will no longer be available on prescription in Greater Nottingham.

The decision was based on a number of factors. Firstly, gluten free products are far more widely available than when gluten prescribing was first started. Secondly, there are lots of naturally gluten free food products to choose from. Thirdly, the local NHS is currently facing financial challenges so must review all services it provides to ensure it can focus our resources on the greatest health needs of our population.

It was also noted that adopting this option would bring the Greater Nottingham CCGs in line with the other local CCGs of Mansfield and Ashfield , and Newark and Sherwood, who implemented this in early 2017.

When is this change proposed to take place?

This will be in place on 7 November 2018 and GP practices will be recommended to stop prescribing gluten-free foods to all those newly diagnosed with coeliac disease and/or dermatitis herpetiformis from that date.

The CCGs, in partnership with the local practices, will be writing to all patients who currently receive gluten free food on prescription to explain the change. We'd expect all gluten free prescribing to stop from December 2018.

Who will be affected by this proposed change?

People who have been diagnosed with coeliac disease and/ or dermatitis herpetiformis and who have been receiving gluten-free foods on prescription will be affected by this change.

The products I have received previously are only available on prescription, what can I do?

All gluten free foods can be purchased from a pharmacy or supermarket or ordered direct from the manufacturer. There is no restriction that requires a prescription for a gluten free product. There is no expectation of 'better quality' when a gluten free food is prescribed rather than bought.

Patients may find it convenient and cost-effective to purchase items on-line and have them delivered or to ask their pharmacy or supermarket to order the products for them.

What is the cost of gluten free products to the local NHS?

The total annual spend across Greater Nottingham is £156,000. The price paid by the NHS for gluten free foods on prescription is much higher than supermarket prices and in some cases it may be two to three times more expensive.

How will I ensure I maintain a healthy diet for my condition?

Patients are free to purchase products as they choose based on preference and consumption. The higher price charged to the NHS by suppliers compared to supermarket prices may actually be holding prices artificially high. By removing this distorting factor the market for gluten free foods should be more attractive for manufacturers to produce suitable products at competitive prices. NHS Choices website has information about diet choices for people living with coeliac disease - www.nhs.uk/conditions/coeliac-disease

Are there other ways in which the NHS could save money?

We are constantly looking for ways to save money without impacting on patient care. This means that we have to look at how we can do things differently.

Gluten free food on prescription is more nutritious and better quality than supermarket bread

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The term gluten free can only be used on foods which contain 20 parts per million (ppm) or less of gluten. When you see gluten free on a label, you know these foods are suitable for a gluten free diet.

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Coeliac Disease patients get a lot less time and support than diabetics. Will you be offering extra support for people with coeliac disease who will no longer receive gluten free foods on prescription?

We will continue to support, advise and monitor patients diagnosed with coeliac disease through our GP practices and dietetics services and support patients to self care for their condition.

We also plan to monitor the changes to prescribing and whether they have an impact on patients' ability to manage their conditions.

We encourage patients with coeliac disease who are having difficulty maintaining a gluten free diet to seek advice and support from Coeliac UK who provide a lot of useful information and resources on their website www.coeliac.org.uk

How will you monitor and evaluate?

We will be working with local clinicians to put in place a feedback mechanism to monitor whether patients are struggling to maintain a gluten free diet after the changes.

We also plan to work with GPs to contact a number of patients after 12 months to ask if the changes have had an impact on their adherence to the diet/ their health.

How do we strengthen support for patients, who may have more than one condition?

Support is available via GP practices. If a GP feels the patient needs extra support, they can refer to other health services such as community dieticians, to support people to manage their diets and conditions.

How can I give my opinions about this change in policy?

We always want to hear what patients think, whether that is positive or negative, and it will help our review of this policy. You can register your opinions by contacting our Patient Experience Team - see the information below.

Please contact the CCG Patient Experience team on: 0115 883 9570 or email ncccg.patientexperience@nhs.net

Useful links

www.nhs.uk/conditions/coeliac-disease

www.coeliac.org.uk