

Our gluten-free guidelines – Your questions

Gluten free prescribing is changing in the North Hampshire Clinical Commissioning Group, due to the unprecedented financial pressure the NHS is under.

Cost of gluten-free products to the NHS

Prescribable Gluten-free items often cost more than double the supermarket price of similar items, but it is still unclear why the NHS is charged so much.

| Products | Reimbursement price by NHS on prescription | Supermarket price for gluten free product | Supermarket price for gluten-containing equivalent |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Loaf of bread (400 - 500g) | £1.49 to £8.70 | £1.99 to £3.00 | £0.50 to £1.70 |
| Plain flour (1kg) | £2.95 to £14.70 | £1.99 to £3.00 | £1.00 to £1.89 |
| Self-raising flour (1kg) | £9.31 | £1.99 to £3.00 | £1.18 to £1.80 |
| Bread mix (240g-250g) | £1.04 to £4.48 | £2.49 to £2.68 | £0.75 to £1.20 |
| Pizza base (each) | £1.33 to £5.00 | £0.90 to £1.00 | £0.50 to £0.85 |
| Pasta (500g) | £2.72 to £11.25 | £1.35 to £2.00 | £0.29 to £2.40 |
| Cake/pastry | None in Drug Tariff | £0.90 to £1.00 | £0.12 to £1.00 |
| Biscuits (200g) | £2.09 to £3.82 | £0.88 to £3.86 | £0.39 to £1.50 |
| 500g oats | £2.78 to £2.89 | £2.25 to £3.00 | £0.56 to £3.69 |
| 300g breakfast cereal | £2.58 to £4.56 | £1.50 to £3.25 | £1.50 to £2.69 |

**NHS prices from MIMS March 2014 and Drug Tariff March 2014. Supermarket prices collected from www.mysupermarket.co.uk on 28th February and 1st March 2014. Supermarkets included: Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Morrison's. No special offer prices included. Delivery/surcharges not included

Why have you stopped funding some gluten-free foods?

In recent years the variety and accessibility of gluten free products in supermarkets has improved dramatically. The vast majority of fresh foods are naturally gluten-free, however, we do recognise that some specialist gluten-free products cost more than the equivalent gluten containing items. We have therefore looked at ways in which we can minimise the financial pressures rather than stop prescribing altogether.

We have decided to limit prescribing of gluten-free foods to staples that are mostly requested and versatile, i.e. bread and flours. This means funding about 60% of the Coeliac UK recommended staple units. We would expect you to buy some of the staples yourself.

Why are you prescribing only bread, flour?

The decision was taken to fund bread and flours as North Hampshire CCG spend 58% of all Gluten-free products prescribed on breads and flours. Gluten free breads are also significantly more costly than the gluten containing equivalents in the supermarkets. The

Adapted from PresQIPP guideline published in February 2015

Produced by Hampshire Hospitals prescribing support dietitians in partnership with West Hampshire CCG

addition of flour (including multipurpose flour and bread mixes) allows people to cook or bake other foods.

Why are only some brands of bread and flour included?

We have included all brands that are available as a stock item to local pharmacies from the majority of local wholesalers without restrictions on minimum order. We have excluded products that have additional administration charges, delivery or other charges added to the list price as these costs will be incurred by the NHS and mean that the single products end up being significantly more expensive to the NHS than if they were purchased from a supermarket.

Staple foods - Foods that can be prescribed by patient request:

- Breads (including fresh)
- Bread mix
- Flour

Foods only to be prescribed if indicated by a specialist health professional

- Breakfast cereals and Oats
- Sweet and savoury biscuits
- Pasta and Pizza bases
- Rolls and crispbreads
- Pastry and cakes mixes
- Xanthan gum

Why have you now included fresh bread?

We appreciate that many people prefer fresh bread and many gluten free suppliers have now removed the substantial surcharges that were associated with fresh bread.

Why can't I get my gluten-free products from the supermarket on prescription?

It would be nice if we could do this – unfortunately the way the NHS works means that only pharmacies or dispensing doctors' practices are able to dispense NHS prescriptions.

Why are you no longer funding biscuits, cakes, etc.?

It is generally accepted that these products are treats and not part of an everyday healthy diet. To prescribe items on the NHS considered treats would be at odds with national health messages.

Why are you not funding pizza bases and pasta on prescription anymore?

Gluten-free pizza bases are available from supermarkets at a reasonable cost and are similarly priced to the equivalent gluten-containing products. Gluten-free pasta remain

more expensive than supermarkets' own brand but is still a relatively cheap product (at about 30p a portion for gluten-free pasta).

Some areas have set up schemes allowing people to get their gluten-free products straight from their pharmacy without a prescription – why can't you do this?

We could do this but it would not save any money. We would still have to pay the pharmacies for the items provided. The Prescription Pricing Authority currently arranges payments to pharmacies on our behalf. However, if we were to stop using prescriptions and supply straight from the pharmacy we would have to set up administration locally to deal with the payments, which would actually add to the cost. We do not currently have the resources locally to set this up.

Are there no other ways in which the NHS could save money?

We are constantly looking for ways to save money without impact on patient care. This means that we have to look at how we can do things differently and every little helps. The basis of this policy is not to penalise those who suffer from Coeliac disease but to provide some support towards the increased cost of maintaining a gluten-free diet.

People with Coeliac disease are not alone - there are frequently restrictions on the range of items that can be supplied under the NHS both on prescription and other items. Examples of other areas where this applies include the provision of a synthetic wig (but not a real-hair wig), dentures, crowns and bridges (but not dental implants), basic spectacle frames (but not necessarily fashionable ones).

This information has also been given to the GPs and Pharmacists in the North Hampshire Clinical Commissioning Group. If you have any concerns about this information or would like to be referred to a Dietitian, please discuss this with your GP.

Further information:

The Coeliac UK website (www.coeliac.org.uk) offers a wealth of information about gluten free diets and lifestyle. For further details regarding membership, please visit the website.

