

Putting nutrition at the heart of patient care

An Update on Specialist Nutrition

Specialist nutrition supports positive health outcomes and reduces costs to the NHS.

The Department of Health and Social Care recognises the value of gluten-free foods on prescription for those clinically diagnosed with coeliac disease

On 1st February 2018, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) announced the outcome of its consultation on the availability of gluten-free (GF) foods on prescription in primary care.¹ The consultation, which took place between 31 March 2017 to 22 June 2017, proposed 3 options:

Option 1: Make no changes to the National Health Service Regulations 2004

Option 2: To end the prescribing of GF foods in primary care

Option 3: To only allow the prescribing of certain GF foods

The National consultation received an overwhelming number of responses from a wide range of stakeholders, including Coeliac UK, patients and healthcare professionals. **A decision was taken to retain GF prescribing in England, however limiting these foods to bread and flour mixes only (Option 3).** This is a really positive outcome for patients with coeliac disease.

Coeliac disease is a lifelong autoimmune condition in which the ingestion of gluten damages the lining of the intestine. The only treatment for coeliac disease is to follow a strict GF diet. Poor adherence to treatment can lead to associated long-term health complications, for example malnutrition, osteoporosis and a rare type of bowel cancer.

Adherence

The decision by the DHSC was driven by a number of factors, including concern by many clinicians that removing access to GF foods would lead to gluten ingestion, impacting on patient health in the long-term. Recent research² and patient responses highlighted how a prescription not only helps with adherence to a GF diet, especially those who are newly diagnosed, but also provides a level of support from a healthcare professional. Patients were also more likely to access an annual health review, which is recommended by the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Quality Standard.³

Access

The report acknowledges that a prescription provides coeliac patients with a reliable and accessible supply of GF foods to help adherence to a GF diet. Even though GF foods are much more widely available now than ever before, many local shops and budget supermarkets do not stock GF foods and there are inconsistencies with supply in larger supermarkets. This can affect all coeliac patients, however for those in rural areas, without transport or who are housebound, trying to obtain GF foods can be challenging. A prescription allows collection or home deliveries from a pharmacy to address this.

References 1. Department of Health and Social Care (2018). Availability of gluten-free foods on NHS prescription. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/availability-of-gluten-free-foods-on-nhs-prescription. 2. Muhammad, H, et al (2017). Adherence to a Gluten Free Diet Is Associated with Receiving Gluten Free Foods on Prescription and Understanding Food Labelling. *Nutrients*; 9(7): pii: E705. 3. NICE (2016). Coeliac disease. Quality standard [QS134]. Available at: www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs134. 4. Kinsey L, Burden ST, Bannerman E (2008). A dietary survey to determine if patients with coeliac disease are meeting current healthy eating guidelines and how their diet compares to that of the British general population. *Eur J Clin Nutr*; 62(11): 1333-42.

Economic Impact

Many respondents reported an adverse impact on the family food shopping bill, as GF foods remain substantially more expensive. This was seen as a particular concern for families who had more than one family member with coeliac disease. The British Dietetic Association (BDA) state that the provision of GF foods on prescription reduces the financial burden of the patients purchasing GF formulated foods.

Nutritional Contribution

It is important that patients with coeliac disease have an adequate balance of nutrients to stay healthy. GF foods on prescription are often fortified with additional nutrients, especially bread, to help patients to achieve a balanced diet.⁴ This was acknowledged in the report.

As NHS England is facing significant financial challenges, BSNA supports the need to restrict prescribing to be able to save costs, yet still provide a level of support to those who need it to prevent further costs in the future. This consultation has highlighted the importance a GF prescription has in managing coeliac disease. Many Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) have made local decisions to restrict or cease prescribing of GF foods in their area. This regional variation was picked up by the DHSC, who said that it was leading to inequality of access. We therefore hope that CCGs review their policies to be in line with the National consultation outcome, allowing every patient with coeliac disease access to bread and flour mixes.

The full response from the DHSC can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/availability-of-gluten-free-foods-on-nhs-prescription

Complementary weaning foods: Did you know?

- ✓ Commercially made complementary weaning foods are specifically regulated for under European legislation [Directive 2006/125/EC under the 2009/39/EC European Framework Directive on Foods for Particular Nutritional Uses]
- ✓ All baby foods being marketed as suitable for the 6-36 months category must be in compliance with this legislation
- ✓ This specific legislation details composition and labelling within the different baby categories
- ✓ It also stipulates restrictions and limits on contaminants such as pesticides and heavy metals
- ✓ The legislation is based on comprehensive data from the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

About the British Specialist Nutrition Association

BSNA is the trade association representing the manufacturers of products designed to meet the particular nutritional needs of individuals; these include specialist products for infants and young children (including infant formula, follow-on formula, young child formula and complementary weaning foods), medical nutrition products for diagnosed disorders and medical conditions, including parenteral nutrition, and gluten-free foods on prescription. www.bsna.co.uk