

## Common causes of confusion

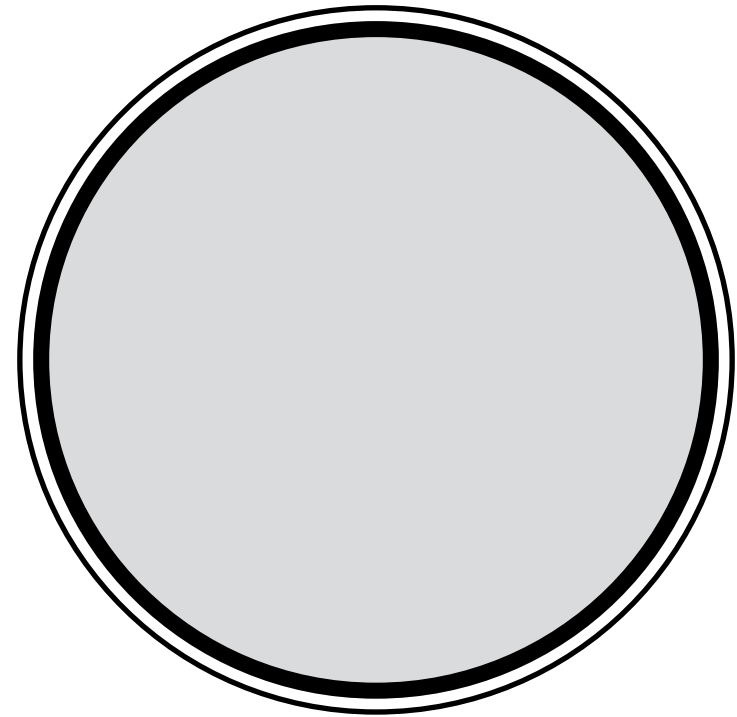
There are two related circumstances which regularly cause confusion.

The first is the use of misleading descriptions – especially of describing low-gluten altar breads as gluten-free. This commonly derives from the fact that the food industry uses the misleadingly titled ‘International Gluten-free Standard’ to accredit wheat starch from which the maximum amount of gluten has been removed. It is misleading because although this wheat starch contains only a microscopic amount of gluten, it continues to contain some. In absolute terms it is not gluten-free but low-gluten. Being low-gluten it remains suitable for use for making altar breads for use in the Catholic Church for those with milder forms of gluten-allergy. However altar-breads made using this wheat starch will not be suitable for those people who have the most severe forms of allergy to gluten.

The second source of confusion arises when low-gluten altar breads are confused with no-gluten or gluten-free altar ‘breads’. As already noted some other churches have allowed the use of gluten-free products, such as altar ‘breads’ made from potato starch. The confusion can be great when these ‘breads’ are advertised as gluten-free alongside what are *described* as gluten-free but are in fact low-gluten altar breads. The confusion can also be the cause of great upset both to those Catholics who are allergic to gluten and to those who minister to them.

The Bishops’ Conference has asked that all manufacturers and suppliers making altar-breads available for use in the Roman Catholic Church should ensure that these products meet the requirements of the Church and are accurately labelled and advertised so that those ordering and using them do so with complete confidence.

Parishes and other communities are advised that they should only order low-gluten hosts from those manufacturers and suppliers whose details are recorded on the Bishops’ Conference website: [www.catholic-ew.org.uk/liturg/Docs/Coeliacs/Suppliers.html](http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/liturg/Docs/Coeliacs/Suppliers.html)



# Holy Communion and People with Coeliac Disease

**F**ollowing the example of Christ, the Church has always used bread and wine with water to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

The bread for celebrating the Eucharist must be made only from wheat, must be recently baked, and, according to the ancient tradition of the Latin Church, must be unleavened.

The wine for the Eucharistic Celebration must be from the fruit of the grapevine (cf. Luke 22:18), natural, and unadulterated, that is, without admixture of extraneous substances.

*The General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 319-322*

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The Catholic Church requires that the bread used at Mass be made from only wheat flour mixed with water.

### **Gluten allergy**

This causes difficulties for some people who are allergic to gluten. Gluten is a protein and a natural constituent of wheat. It is the gluten that is responsible for the elasticity of kneaded dough and makes possible the forming of bread from just flour and water. Although the degree of allergic reaction will vary from person to person, many people with such an allergy cannot safely eat bread made from standard wheat flour.

The Church has readily acceded to the request that for such individuals as need it a low-gluten bread may be permitted for use at Mass. The recent letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith can be read at <http://www.catholic-ew.org.uk/liturgy/Documents/Coeliacs/CDF.html>

### **Low-gluten bread**

Low-gluten bread for Mass is made using wheat flour. However this is flour from which virtually all gluten has been removed.

Sometimes what is truly low-gluten bread is referred to as gluten-free, but that is misleading, for it is in fact not 100% gluten-free. A small proportion of the gluten remains, albeit an extremely small proportion. It is because of this that low-gluten bread continues to meet the requirements of the Catholic Church, and may be offered at Mass and used for the communion of those with gluten allergy.

### **Low-gluten bread is not safe for all**

This low-gluten bread is acceptable to many people with an allergy to gluten, but not to them all. Some people have such a pronounced allergic reaction to gluten that they may not safely eat from any bread made from wheat flour. Even extremely low amount of gluten in a low-gluten altar bread could be dangerous to them. Consequently, and regrettably, the combination of these people's medical condition and the tradition of the Church means that they are unable to receive Holy Communion under the form of bread. In the Roman Catholic Church, therefore, they would, as a matter of course, receive Holy Communion only under the form of wine. In receiving Holy Communion even under this form only they receive Christ whole and entire. (cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1376-7*)

### **Gluten-free 'bread' may not be used**

Some other Christian communities have permitted the use of truly gluten free altar 'breads', made not from wheat flour at all but using rice or potato flour. However these 'breads' are not acceptable for use at Roman Catholic celebrations of the Mass.

It is therefore of the utmost importance that suppliers of altar-breads to the Church accurately label their products. The only altar-breads that may be used by the Catholic community are those made using wheat flour and water only. In normal circumstances altar breads made from standard wheat flour should be used, but where there is need for particular individuals, permission can be obtained to use altar breads made from low-gluten flour.

### **Practical arrangements**

Where there is need for a person to receive Holy Communion under the form of low-gluten bread, they should approach their parish priest who will ask the local bishop for the necessary permission. Having received the necessary permission the practical arrangements regarding the ordering and use of this bread will then be made locally. They are not complicated. However as with any change it may take a little time for all involved to become used to any new arrangements.

The bishop can also be asked to issue a certificate to those who need to receive Holy Communion under the form of low-gluten bread for their convenience while travelling and attending Mass away from their regular place(s) of worship.