

NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Policy Statement: Prescribing of Gluten-free (GF) Food

Policy Statement:

NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin (NHSSTW) does not support the prescribing of Gluten-free Food.

Patients should be signposted to appropriate sources of information on maintaining a healthy gluten-free diet and will be expected to purchase GF foods if required.

Coeliac disease is an autoimmune condition associated with chronic inflammation of the small intestine, which can lead to malabsorption of nutrients. Dietary proteins known as glutes, which are present in wheat, barley and rye, activate an abnormal mucosal immune response. Clinical and histological improvements usually follow when gluten is excluded from the diet.

The treatment of coeliac disease is a lifelong, gluten-free diet. Specific education and information, such as advice and education on alternative foods in the diet to maintain a healthy and varied intake, may increase the likelihood of adherence and a positive prognosis.

Rationale for the Decision

Gluten-free (GF) foods have been available on prescription to patients diagnosed with gluten sensitivity since the late 1960s because their availability was extremely limited. A wide range of GF foods, however, is now readily available in supermarkets and other food outlets, meaning that the ability of patients to obtain these foods without a prescription has greatly increased.

Gluten-free (GF) food is considerably more costly when obtained via NHS prescription rather than being purchased. In some food outlets GF staple foods e.g. bread and flour are more expensive than the equivalent gluten containing items but it is possible for many coeliac patients to alter their diet and replace bread with naturally gluten-free foods such as rice or potato.

With a growing population, rising demand for services and a limited budget, NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin has to ensure that we are using NHS funds appropriately and fairly. It has therefore, been decided that NHSSTW will not support the prescribing of GF products.

This policy is based on the best available information at the time of writing.

Information Sources

NHSE Website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coeliac-disease/treatment/>

Nice Guidance: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng20>

Coeliac Uk: <https://www.coeliac.org.uk/healthcare-professionals/>