

# Getting a Feel for Gluten Free Cooking

By Dr. Laura Hady

Twenty years ago, my sister was diagnosed with celiac disease. This condition is defined by a complete intolerance for gluten, the structural protein in wheat, barley and rye flours. Symptoms can include bloating, diarrhea, low energy, and the inability to absorb nutrients such as Vitamin B12. It can even lead to osteoporosis.

Since her discovery, I have made it my mission to create delicious gluten-free recipes that are not dry, crumbly or with a taste like cardboard. All of these are too often the hallmarks of a gluten-free bake. I do this by adjusting flour ratios, using novel sweeteners, and changing the moisture/fat content in recipes through trial and error.

Gluten is another term for the proteins present in flour. Once moisture has been added to flour, networks of protein are created to add elasticity, which prevents crumbling. Xanthan gum at 1 teaspoon per recipe is also an essential part of gluten-free baking because it acts as a binding agent gives the dough an elastic and sticky quality. Types of gluten-free flours can be mixed at home to improve texture and keep baking recipes from being too dense. Adding starches (corn, potato, and tapioca) to a base like brown rice flour adds lightness to the recipes. Fortunately, many all-purpose gluten free flour mixes such as Bob's Red Mill, Krusteaz, Pillsbury and Great Value have the correct proportions of ingredients and are available at many local grocery food chains.

While many people with celiac disease can still eat sugar, some must cut down on the amount of processed sugar to decrease inflammation. Honey, liquid apple sugar, and natural maple syrup can help retain moisture in gluten free recipes. Coconut palm sugar, maple sugar and date sugar may be used in baking recipes because they have a similar structure and taste to granulated sugar. I try to avoid sugar substitutes such as stevia (it can add a bitter taste) and sugar alcohols like sorbitol because they can contribute to bloating and diarrhea in those with celiac disease. The addition of applesauce (pear or apple), yogurt, silken tofu, an extra egg or mashed banana can add both sweetness and moisture to a recipe, as can replacing some of the fat in gluten-free recipes. While adding extra moisture can improve

the flavor and texture in gluten-free baking, please remember to refrigerate or freeze gluten-free items as they tend to spoil sooner.

Some healthy sources of fat for those affected by celiac disease include avocado oil, flaxseed oil, ghee or butter (if not lactose intolerant), extra virgin olive oil, and grapeseed oil. I have also used coconut butter and vegetable shortening (without trans fats) in baking. When used in gluten-free baking, the textures usually turn out cakier rather than light and crispy. Another great fat source in recipes are nut butters, but always check the label for hidden gluten. The best part about home baking is that you can control the quantity and quality of the fats.

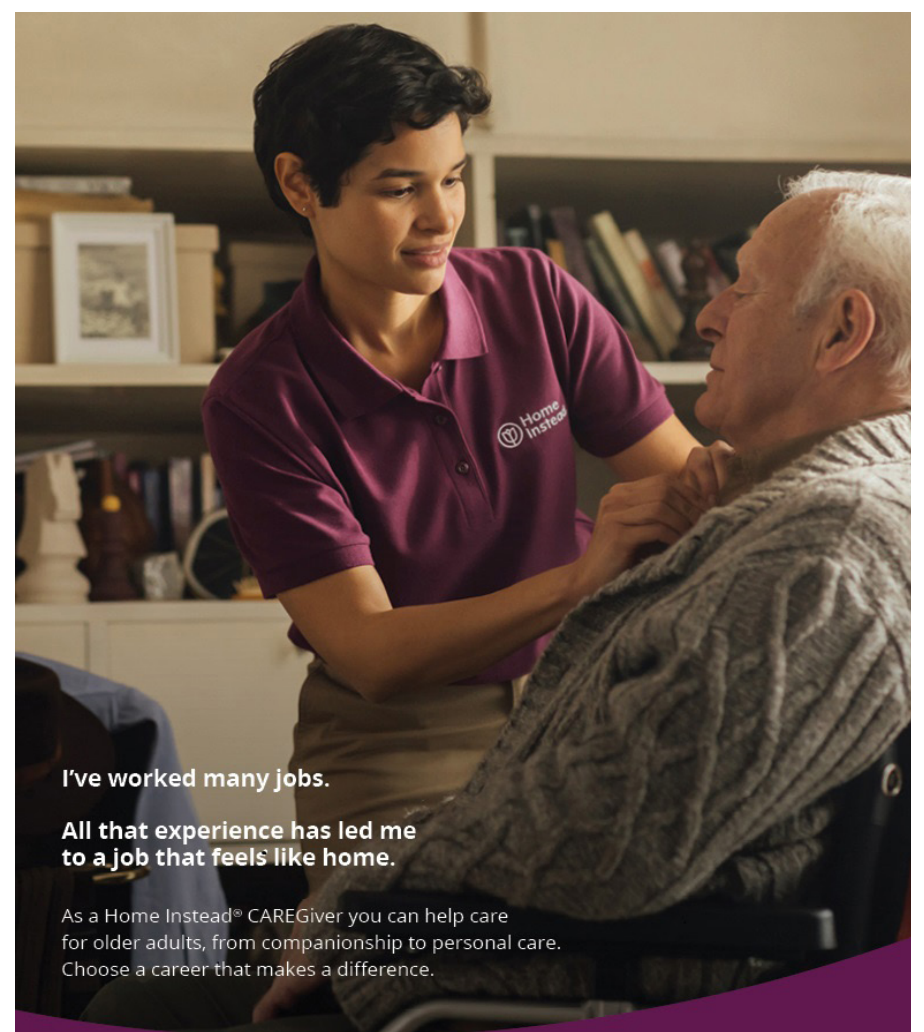
The following recipe for Key Lime Ginger Coconut Cookies from my new book, Home Tested Gluten Free Recipes 2nd Edition, uses coconut milk as the fat, moisture and binding agent. The addition of shredded coconut and coconut flour adds a mild sweetness to contrast with the tartness of the key lime extract and zest. I increase the amount of baking soda for lightness and some cream of tartar to add some chewiness to the cookies. Other gluten free cookbooks include the Gluten-free Cookbook for Beginners (by Jessica Kirk), the Everything Gluten-Free & Dairy Free Cookbook (by Audrey Roberts), and True Comfort: More than 100 Cozy Recipes free of Gluten and Refined Sugar (by Kristin Cavallari). These books will inspire you to learn more about gluten-free cooking, but also how to reduce sugar and dairy products in your cooking.

## Key Lime Ginger Coconut Cookies

- 1 15-oz. can full-fat coconut milk
- 1 c. granulated sugar of choice
- 1 tsp. key lime extract
- Zest of two limes
- ½ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. xanthan gum
- 1 tsp. cream of tartar
- 1 ½ c. gluten-free flour mix
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. powdered ginger
- 2 tsp. fresh/minced ginger
- 1 cup shredded unsweetened coconut flakes

Heat oven to 350 degrees F. Cream together the coconut milk and sugar. Sift together the salt, xanthan gum, cream of tartar, gluten free flour mix, baking soda, and baking powder. Stir into sugar

mixture. Finally, stir in the key lime extract, the zest of 2 limes, the powdered ginger and the minced ginger. Chill for 30 minutes in the refrigerator. Roll into small walnut-sized balls and then roll in coconut and press down onto a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake eight to 12 minutes on the middle rack, turning the pan around at the half-way mark and placing a sheet of aluminum foil on the bottom rack. Remove from the oven and place cookies on wire racks to cool. Note: You can use lemon extract and lemon peel zest if you do not have the lime items.



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