



Fast Casual - Insights for Innovative Restaurants
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What did consumers' taste buds crave in 2014? Not gluten.

Gluten-free options are now available in 9 percent of U.S. restaurants, according to research from Food Genius. That's a five-point increase in 2014.

Mentions of "gluten-free" on restaurant menus increase 200 percent between 2010 and 2013, according to Mintel.

Several notable fast casual brands made gluten-free menu additions in 2014::

- *Smashburger rolled out gluten-free buns in May

- *Fatburger added its "Skinnyburger" - a hamburger patty sliced in half with sandwich fixings wedged in between - in August

- *Jason's Deli added gluten-free chicken nuggets in September

And at least one expert thinks the gluten-free trend isn't going away any time soon. The FDA has added a definition of "gluten-free" to its designations, said MenuTrinfo CEO Betsy Craig, and that demonstrates the importance of the issue.

Having gluten-free offerings on the menu helps not only diners who have been diagnosed with celiac disease, but also with diners who have other allergies or sensitivities, a population that has grown 50 percent since 1997. Restaurants benefit when they add gluten-free options, said Craig, with sales lifting 3 to 4 percent over the long term.

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