

Helping Your Child with the Gluten-Free Diet

Advice from your dietitian will help you and your child manage the gluten-free diet. Support from other parents of children with celiac disease will also be helpful as you adjust to the diet as a family.

Learn together

- Tell your child that they have a health condition and they will need to avoid certain foods to stay healthy.
- Learn about celiac disease and the gluten-free diet as a family. Find children's books about celiac disease to read together.
- Teach and help your child to follow the gluten-free diet all of the time to stay healthy.
- Focus on all the foods your child can eat, rather than on the foods your child can't eat.
- Involve your child in making gluten-free meals and snacks. Try new recipes and practice reading labels together.
- Get connected to local celiac groups. They can provide support and tips about gluten-free food and restaurants in your area.
- Teach your child what to say when people offer them food. It may be helpful to practice saying the words out loud.
- Emotional support can help you adjust to living with celiac disease. Reach out for support from others with celiac disease, support groups, or mental health services.

Tips for at home



- Make a gluten-free cupboard for your child. Everything in the cupboard will be gluten-free, so they can eat without worrying.
- Keep a separate toaster and cutting board in the gluten-free cupboard. This way other family members aren't tempted to use them.

- Use one of the drawers in your fridge to store your child's peanut butter, jam, cheese spreads, and margarine to avoid cross-contamination.
- Place stickers on gluten-free foods so your child knows which foods are safe to eat.
- Be aware of gluten in play-dough. Make or buy gluten-free versions if you think your child may put it in their mouth or eat it.

Eating away from home

- Ensure that anyone who may offer your child food knows they have celiac disease. Offer a list of foods your child can eat, or make food for your child to take with them.
- If your child is invited to an event, check ahead of time what food will be served. Ask about how and where food will be made and served, to help identify sources of cross-contamination.
- If attending an event at someone's home, offer to bring a gluten-free food item to share.
- Send gluten-free snacks with your child in case there are no gluten-free foods available.

Special events and holidays

- Bake or buy gluten-free cupcakes in advance and freeze them. Take out a cupcake and frost it when needed.
- Offer to host events, so you can ensure foods are gluten-free.



Tips for school

- Talk to your child about why they can't share food with others.
- Teach your child to wash their hands before meals and snacks. If there are times when your child won't have access to a sink, they can use disposable wipes instead.
- At the start of the year, meet with your child's teachers to give them information and handouts on celiac disease. Make sure that everyone who may offer food to your child has read this information.
- Discuss hot lunches, birthday parties, and social events as they come up with your child. Get their input and make a plan together.

Elementary school age

Talk with your child's teacher about special events with food.

- Discuss the foods offered and if you need to send food with your child on those days.
- Give the teacher a box of "just-in-case" gluten-free food items. If a special occasion arises, your child will not be left out.
- Discuss risks of cross-contamination.
- Have your child use a plate or napkin beneath their food when eating at a table with other kids.



If your child's school has a breakfast, lunch, or snack program:

- Find out what foods are served ahead of time. Advise the school which foods your child can eat.
- Ask about how and where food is made, to help identify cross-contamination.
- If your child can't eat the food provided, send along a similar gluten-free food.

Junior high and high school age

- Practice label reading with your child. Encourage your child to read food labels every time.
- Ask for a copy of the cafeteria or concession menu. Review the foods with your child and create a list of foods that are safe to eat.
- Come up with a list of questions with your child about how and where food is made. Your child can use this list to ask about cross-contamination.
- Some classes, such as food studies, involve making food. Connect with the teacher and find ways for your child to participate. Offer to send ingredients, such as gluten-free flour, so your child can make a gluten-free version of recipes made in class.

For more information:

- Canadian Celiac Association
www.celiac.ca
- AHS Gluten-Free Diet handout
www.ahs.ca/assets/info/nutrition/if-nfs-gluten-free-diet.pdf
- Celiac Disease – Teachers' Info
https://www.celiac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CD_Teachers.pdf

Adapted from the Calgary Celiac News and experiences of parents and children followed at Stollery Children's Hospital.