

CELIAC DISEASE: THE BASICS

WHAT IS CELIAC DISEASE?

Celiac disease (CD) is an autoimmune disease. When someone with CD eats gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley, and rye, their immune system attacks and damages the small intestine. Intestinal villi are destroyed in the process, making it difficult for the body to absorb nutrients. This can lead to malnourishment, anemia, infertility, and more.

TREATING CELIAC DISEASE

The only treatment for celiac disease is a strict, lifelong gluten-free diet. A gluten-free diet means avoiding foods that contain wheat, rye, and barley in all forms. Even tiny amounts of gluten can set off the immune system and damage the body. Left untreated (e.g. regularly consuming gluten), people with CD are at risk for serious health consequences.

LABEL READING

In the USA, ingredient labels are on almost all commercial food products. Read ingredient labels every time to verify there are no gluten-containing ingredients. Whenever possible, buy products labeled gluten-free. While label reading can seem overwhelming at first, you'll become confident over time.

FOODS AND INGREDIENTS TO AVOID

wheat • barley • rye • malt • brewer's yeast • bran • triticale • dextrin • seitan • semolina • farro • spelt • emmer • einkorn • couscous • bulgur • hydrolyzed wheat protein • beer

FOODS TO BE CAUTIOUS OF

sauces • soy sauce • gravies • soup mixes • chips • cereals • imitation meat • vinegar • oats* • "natural flavors" on ingredient lists • dried spices and herbs (may be cut with wheat flour) candy • imitation crab • most beers

*While oats are technically gluten-free, they are frequently in cross-contact with gluten. Only buy certified gluten-free oats.

NON-FOOD ITEMS TO BE CAUTIOUS OF

- Medications; some drugs and supplements may contain wheat starch. Contact your pharmacist/healthcare provider to ensure your prescriptions are gluten-free.
- Chapstick and lip products; may be accidentally ingested in small amounts.
- Toothpaste.
- Communion wafers; discuss options with your Church.
- Bulk bins in grocery stores; often sources of cross-contact.
- Play-Doh; often made with wheat.
- Pet food; wash hands after serving it to your pet.
- Shared kitchens/restaurants; may be issues with cross-contact.
- Convection ovens; can be a source of cross-contact.

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FOODS YOU CAN EAT!

fruits and vegetables • dairy, including milk, butter and yogurt (but watch out for additives) • nuts • beans • meats, including chicken, fish, pork and beef • eggs • distilled alcohol • wine

GRAINS YOU CAN EAT!

corn • rice • teff • millet • sorghum
• wild rice • amaranth • buckwheat
• quinoa • coconut • tapioca
• flours made from nuts, beans or coconut

COOKING AT HOME

- Prevent cross-contact at home by educating your family about what you can and can't eat.
- Wash all cooking surfaces before preparing gluten-free foods.
- Reserve the top shelf in the pantry, fridge, and freezer for gluten-free products only. This way, there's no chance gluten crumbs will fall on them.
- Remind your family not to share utensils, pots, pans, toasters, and other dishes without thoroughly washing them, and avoid all wooden utensils, which are porous and can trap gluten, as well as scratched pots and pans—you may want to have your own set of dishes/cookware.
- Ask family not to dip a knife into condiments, like mayo and peanut butter jars, if the knife has already touched a piece of bread. (Squeezable condiments may come in handy!)

DINING OUT

Eating out with celiac disease is possible, it just requires more preparation!

- Explain to the chef and wait staff what cross-contact is and ask what precautions are taken to prevent it.
- Remind the kitchen staff to use clean utensils, cutting boards, pots, pans, etc. when preparing your meal. If a grill is used, request that they place a barrier like aluminum foil between your food and the grill surface.
- Avoid anything with malt vinegar, ask for no croutons on your salad, and ensure vegetables and pasta are boiled in a new pot of water.
- Make sure to tip staff for their accommodations!
- Bring backup food just in case there's nothing you can eat at the restaurant.

FOLLOW-UP TESTING

Important tests to get soon after your diagnosis are:

- Nutritional anemia profile (hemoglobin, hematocrit, folate, ferritin, vitamin B12)
- Vitamin profile (thiamin, vitamin B6, 25-hydroxy vitamin D)
- Mineral profile (copper, zinc)

Depending on your results, you may need to take supplements for a few months until your gut heals.

Once healing begins, have your antibodies (IgA-tTG) checked with a blood test each year to ensure you are staying gluten-free. Your family should get their antibodies tested too—first-degree family members are at a higher risk of developing celiac disease. Research shows they want to hear about their risk in a serious, in-person, one-on-one conversation rather than a text or email.

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