

What is celiac disease?

Celiac disease is an **autoimmune disease**. When someone with celiac disease 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. The only treatment for celiac disease is a strict, lifelong gluten-free diet.

What do you do if a student is exposed to gluten?

Being glutened can be an intense, isolating experience. There are over 250 symptoms of celiac disease, and each person can react to gluten differently. There may also be psychological and psychosocial symptoms after being glutened, including anxiety or behavioral changes. Currently, there is no treatment for being glutened other than time—try to be patient and understanding.

Be aware of gluten in the classroom

Play dough, dry pasta, papier-mâché, and certain craft supplies contain gluten.

It's important to treat celiac disease with the same care and concern as a food allergy

Even very small amounts of gluten, such as crumbs or eating food that has touched gluten, can set off the immune system and damage the body. This reaction may not cause obvious or external symptoms. Emphasize good hand hygiene and keep work stations and eating surfaces clean and free from gluten.

Understand IHP vs 504 plans

An IHP is informal and not legally binding. It addresses medical needs in case of complications (e.g., a glutening) and often involves the school nurse.

A 504 plan is formal and legally binding, and lists reasonable accommodations provided by the school. Teachers and food services are involved.



Practice empathy & trust

Understanding that the 250+ symptoms for celiac patients present themselves differently in each individual and situation is important. Trusting that your student knows their body and the consequences of being glutened is imperative to students feeling safe and comfortable in the classroom.

Giving empathy to parents who are navigating a celiac diagnosis is helpful. As the child's trusted adults, the teacher and parent have the same goals: keeping the child happy and healthy, in the classroom and at home.

When in doubt, ask!

Talk to your student and their family about specific concerns and needs, including privacy management. Check with your student or their parents regarding any ingredient or food preparation questions.

Promote social inclusion

Consider having class-wide celebrations and incentives that are inclusive to all children in the classroom. Being able to participate fully by eating the same treats as peers during class events can be invaluable to a student's sense of belonging in the classroom. If an event cannot be fully inclusive, then consider having safe gluten-free alternatives readily available.

Class outings and field trips

For class excursions and field trips, it's best practice to know that there is a safe food option for your student by consulting with parents before the planned trip.

Be mindful to eliminate situations in which your student could feel left out or ostracized, and be vigilant of any teasing or bullying.

