

# Protecting Students with Celiac Disease



## 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. This makes it extremely difficult for the body to absorb nutrients. The only treatment for celiac disease is a **strict, lifelong gluten-free diet**—no cheat days.

## 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.

Note that while celiac disease can have debilitating effects, it's an autoimmune disease, not an allergy, so treatments like Benadryl® and auto-injectors will have no impact on symptoms.

## How you can help

- Emphasize good hand hygiene for all students.
- Keep work stations clean.
- Tell parents in advance when a food-related activity is coming up.
- Allow bagged lunches for field trips, or ensure there are safe, gluten-free options at the destination. Consult with the student and their guardian(s) before the planned trip on their preferred option.
- Consider classroom celebrations that are not centered around food.
- Be mindful of situations where your student could feel left out or ostracized, and be vigilant of teasing or bullying.
- For those with gastrointestinal symptoms, allow more frequent bathroom breaks.
- In case of a “glutening,” ie, the student ingests gluten, allow them to visit the school nurse. Depending on symptoms and how frequently they get glutened, they may be absent from school more often than other students.

## Potential sources of gluten in classrooms

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|----------------|-----------------------|--|
| • Play dough   | • Some craft supplies | • In life skills classes, “flour babies”               |
| • Dry pasta    | • Some snacks         | • Ingredients in cooking classes, like flour and bread |
| • Papier-mâché | • Some candy          |  |





# More Ways to Help



## What do you do if a student ingests gluten?

There are over 250 symptoms of celiac disease, and each person reacts to gluten differently. Getting sick from ingesting gluten can be an intense, isolating experience. Some may experience GI symptoms, neurological symptoms, or behavioral changes, while others may not experience any symptoms.

Currently, there is no treatment for being glutened other than time. Try to be patient and understanding as the student's body works the gluten out of its system.

## What We Want You To Know

*Message from the student and their guardian(s)*

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## Develop an IHP or 504 plan

The student and their guardian(s) may want to develop an Individualized Health Plan (IHP) or a 504 plan in collaboration with you, the school nurse, and/or food staff. IHPs are informal and not legally binding where 504 plans are formal and legally binding.

## When in doubt, ask!

Talk to your student and their guardian(s) about specific concerns, such as privacy, bullying, or even an ingredient in a classroom snack. They *want* to work *with* you to keep their student safe!

## Additional Resources

- [BeyondCeliac.org](https://BeyondCeliac.org)
- Email [info@beyondceliac.org](mailto:info@beyondceliac.org)
- [BeyondCeliac.org/info-for-schools/](https://BeyondCeliac.org/info-for-schools/)

Scan the QR code to get access to more free resources!

