

# COACHING ATHLETES WITH CELIAC DISEASE



People with celiac disease (CD) can be competitive athletes—gold medalist gymnast Alyssa Baumann and NHL hockey player Kaapo Kakko have CD! Like anyone else, people with CD perform best when they are healthy. Support your student athlete by following the tips below.

## WHAT IS CELIAC DISEASE?

Celiac disease is an autoimmune disease. When someone with CD eats gluten, found in wheat, barley, and rye, their **immune system damages the small intestine**. It is difficult for the body to absorb nutrients when the small intestine is damaged.

## HOW IS CD TREATED?

The **only treatment for CD is a strict, lifelong gluten-free (GF) diet**. Gluten is found in wheat, barley and rye, so someone eating GF avoids consuming anything made with these ingredients. Luckily, most foods, including fruits, vegetables and meat, are GF!

## SUPPORTING YOUR ATHLETE

- When traveling for events, **allow athletes to bring their own food**.
- Avoid pushing athletes to play if they are severely ill.
- Remember, **prevention is key!** Your athlete will perform their best when they're safely gluten-free.
- Notify the athlete and their guardian(s) before a team event involving food so they can bring a GF alternative or recommend a restaurant where the whole team can eat. Events could include:
  - Pizza parties
  - Ice cream celebrations
  - Carbo load events
  - Team potlucks



## NUTRITION

Most protein sources, including beef, pork, poultry, eggs, tofu and dairy are **gluten-free** when eaten plain. However, **protein shakes or whey powders can contain gluten**, so the athlete should only eat them if the product is labeled gluten-free.

**Athletes eating GF can also carb load!** Carbs like rice, corn, potatoes, beans and fruits are all gluten-free.

Nutritional deficiencies are common in those on the gluten-free diet, so your athlete may need supplements to meet nutritional goals—their doctor can help them identify what they need.

## TRAINING

Just like anyone else, training is great for people with CD! Weight-bearing exercises can strengthen the body and bones, and athletes with celiac disease can bulk up so long as they are reliably gluten-free, doing the exercises properly, and getting enough protein.



## IN CASE OF ILLNESS OR INJURY

Some people with celiac disease have debilitating symptoms when they eat gluten, which can last for days. **If your athlete gets “glutened,” they may need to sit out of a practice or game.**

If your athlete still wants to play while ill, ensure they’re hydrating and getting enough electrolytes. Extra water breaks may be necessary.

People with CD, especially the newly diagnosed, tend to bruise and break bones more easily. Any potential injury should be investigated to ensure it’s not serious.



## More Free Resources

- BeyondCeliac.org
- info@beyondceliac.org
- The QR code at right!

Scan the QR code for access to more free resources!

