



The Internet, the news, and research papers... Your family and friends, doctors, and co-workers...they all have advice these days. We are inundated with health information...what is healthy, what isn't, what to do, what not to do. It is all so overwhelming! What do you believe and what is just hype? That is health in general! Now add a chronic disease that is "unknown to most doctors", may have taken years to figure out, and is treated by diet alone. BUT WHAT A DIET!

Welcome to the world of gluten intolerance (celiac disease, dermatitis herpetiformis). It is a relief to know what makes us or our child feel so poorly. Yet the diet seems unmanageable. Avoiding a food or two is not difficult. But this diet is more than that. It's avoiding those foods, things made from gluten...and the list seems endless. It's no wonder people throw their hands up in the air, with tears in their eyes, saying, "so what CAN I eat?"

Yes, there is a lot to know about foods, ingredients, and changes in lifestyle and cooking. This gluten free diet is no easy thing to master in 'one easy step'. So take one step at a time. Elaine Hartsook, Ph.D., RD, once used an upside-down triangle to illustrate the point that there are obvious things that make those with gluten intolerance ill and there are the not so obvious things. Let's use this upside-down triangle as a model to take one step at a time. Tackle the obvious things first, then fine tune more and more. Remember Rome wasn't built in a day...no one expects you to know this diet all at once.

Step One – Omit the obvious foods from your diet. These are foods that can easily be identified as containing the grains to be avoided (wheat, rye, non-GF oats, and barley). Avoid cereals, breads, pasta, desserts. Avoid non-GF beers and ales. Try eggs, cream of rice, or cornmeal mush for breakfast. Substitute rice cakes, rice, potatoes, or corn tortillas for the breads and pastas you have usually eaten. Have sherbet or fruit for dessert. Use vinegar and oil on salads. Drink milk, 100% fruit juice, coffee, or teas. This step is a huge change from the 'normal' diet. Now sit back and breathe! Yes, it is not fun, but you can still eat. Now you are ready to move on to step two.

Step Two – Begin reading labels for hidden sources of gluten in food. Learn what to watch out for by reading labels. Avoid anything you think is suspect for having gluten. Keep in touch with a contact person, the GIG® office or one of the support groups. Step two can be very confusing. You will learn new words, and look at food and food preparation in a new way. It's usually here that people will panic. This is a natural feeling. The reality of your situation is setting in. If need be, break this step into 'baby steps'. Only read labels on a certain group of products, such as condiments or frozen foods. Carry a pen and paper with you. If you find a product that appears to be safe write it down. Once you have a few items in a category of foods add another to your list, so that eventually you have a number of foods you feel comfortable buying. You can quickly review the label each time you purchase it. You still don't know it all, but you are closer and haven't made yourself and those around you crazy in the process.

Step Three – Reach out and touch someone. Now it is time to try calling or writing to a manufacturer. In doing this, make sure you are using the proper terms and being very specific in what you are asking. Look at the sample letter in the diet instruction as a guide. When you can do this, you have just about mastered the diet. You don't have far to go.

Other helpful materials on the gluten free diet from GIG®:

- Quick Start Diet Guide
- Comprehensive Gluten Free Diet by GIG®
- Restaurant Dining – Seven Tips for Staying Gluten Free
- Quick Ingredient Reference Card
- Restaurant Card
- Other documents may be found at www.gluten.net



Step Four – Continue to fine tune. Now start looking at the things you may have never thought of...medicines, mouthwash, and toothpaste. Consider cross-contamination issues – such as toasters, shared foods products like mayonnaise, margarine, and jam. What about your chewing gum or breath mints?

We never stop learning if we choose to keep our eyes and minds open. Be thankful for a diagnosis and someone to lean on. Take one step at a time and learn and grow healthy!

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Other helpful information is available at www.GLUTEN.net.

Advances in celiac disease are fast-paced. If this document is more than 2 years old, please visit our Web site for updated documents.

This information should not be used to diagnose or treat anemia or celiac disease. For questions about anemia and celiac disease consult your healthcare team when considering this information.

Please consider your local GIG branch as another resource.

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GIG is a nonprofit 501c3 national organization providing support for persons with gluten intolerances, in order to live healthy, productive lives. GIG Branches provide support at a local level.

To make a donation or become a volunteer to GIG, visit our Web site or call the office at 253-833-6655.