



What is celiac disease?

Celiac disease (CD) is a genetic digestive disorder that affects 1 in 133 people. Those with celiac disease are unable to digest gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, barley and derivatives of those grains.

When the disease is left undetected or untreated, a child with celiac disease may experience gastrointestinal problems, slowed gross motor development and learning problems. With strict adherence to a gluten-free diet, a child with celiac disease is able to live a normal and happy life.

Celiac disease is also known as “celiac sprue,” “sprue,” and “gluten intolerance.”

What should I watch for?

While on a gluten-free diet, it is unlikely that a student with celiac disease will exhibit any noticeable symptoms of disease. A strict gluten-free diet is a medical requirement for the child's health. Gluten, even in small amounts, damages the intestine.

If a child ingests gluten, he or she may exhibit one or more of the following:

- Bloating, cramps, or foul-smelling gas
- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Vomiting
- Irritability or short-term memory problems, which may interfere with school performance

The severity of these symptoms will vary, but are not likely to escalate to a state of emergency requiring medical intervention. Parents should be notified if gluten is ingested.

Similar symptoms may exist between undiagnosed celiac disease and Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). It would be prudent for classroom teachers to observe students with behavioral and/or learning problems with this in mind.

What are the restrictions?

A student with celiac disease who complies with the gluten-free diet will be able to actively participate in all academic and social activities with few exceptions. Most activities involving food products would be off limits, unless the food is gluten-free.

Arts and crafts

Some materials used for arts and crafts projects may contain gluten. Paste-type glues and Play Dough are potential hazards and should be investigated. Crayons may also be a problem for small children. Work with the child's family to provide safe materials or an alternative project.

School lunch

Limited selections available in school cafeterias mean gluten-free choices may not be available on a daily basis. It is the responsibility of the child's parent(s) or guardian(s) to work with the school dietitian to provide the student's lunch, or work with the cafeteria staff to have alternative gluten-free items available.

Common products with gluten:

- Bread products, cereals, crackers and pasta
- Pastries, cookies, cakes, donuts and other desserts
- Some candies and chewing gum
- Many snack foods
- Finger paints
- Paste-glue, Play Dough and some crayons

