

# Helping Your Child with the Gluten-Free Diet

Your dietitian and healthcare team can help you and your child manage the gluten-free diet.

## Learn together

- Tell your child that they have a health condition, and they need to follow a gluten-free diet all the time to stay healthy.
- Learn about celiac disease and the gluten-free diet as a family. Find children's books about celiac disease to read together.
- Focus on all the foods your child can eat, rather than on the foods your child can't eat.
- Involve your child in making gluten-free meals and snacks. Try new recipes and practice reading labels together.
- Get connected to local celiac groups. They can provide support and tips about gluten-free food and restaurants in your area.
- Teach your child to ask if food contains gluten if they are offered food. Help them identify trusted adults (teachers, caregivers, other parents) they can ask for advice.
- Emotional support can help you and your child adjust to living with celiac disease. Reach out to mental health services, support groups, or others with celiac disease.

## Special events and holidays

- Bake or buy gluten-free cupcakes in advance and freeze them. Take out a cupcake and frost it when needed.
- Offer to host the event or bring gluten-free food (snack or entrée).



## Tips for at home

- Your child can still use the same pots, pans, utensils, dishes, and cups as others in the house. Wash with soap and water between use.
- If there is a kitchen tool or equipment, like toasters, that cannot be cleaned with soap and water after each use, use a separate one for gluten-free foods.
  - Toaster bags can be used for shared toasters to reduce cross-contamination risk.
- Use a separate cloth, sponge, or scrubby for washing dishes and kitchen tools.
- Make a gluten-free cupboard for your child. Everything in the cupboard will be gluten-free, so they can eat without worrying.
- Consider having separate condiments for your child if they are in a jar or tub (like peanut butter, jam, and margarine) to reduce cross-contamination.
  - Squeeze bottle condiments (like ketchup or mustard) are less of a risk of cross-contamination.



- Place stickers on gluten-free foods so your child knows which foods are safe to eat.
- There may be gluten in craft supplies like playdough, modeling clay, paint, and paper-mâché. It is okay for your child to touch and play with it. Have your child wash their hands well after use.
  - Make or buy gluten-free versions if you think your child may put it in their mouth or eat it.

## Eating away from home

- Ensure that anyone who may offer your child food knows they have celiac disease. Offer a list of foods your child can eat or make food for your child to take with them.
- If your child is invited to an event, check ahead of time what food will be served.
- Help your child learn the skills they will need to eat at restaurants.
- If attending an event at someone's home, offer to bring a gluten-free food item to share.
- Send gluten-free snacks with your child in case there are no gluten-free foods available.

## Schools and childcare centers

- Talk with your child's teacher about special events with food. Discuss risks of cross-contamination.
- Talk to your child about why they shouldn't share food with others.
- Teach your child to wash their hands before meals and snacks. If there are times when your child won't have access to a sink, they can use disposable wipes instead.
- At the start of the year, meet with your child's teachers to give them information and handouts on celiac disease. Make sure that everyone who may offer food to your child has read this information.

## Elementary school age

- Chat with your child about hot lunches, birthday parties, and social events as they come up. Get their input and make a plan together.
- Give the teacher a box of "just-in-case" gluten-free foods. If a special occasion arises where other kids bring foods to share, your child will not be left out.



If your child's school has a breakfast, lunch, or snack program:

- Find out what foods are served ahead of time. Advise the school which foods your child can eat.
- Ask about how and where food is made, to help identify cross-contamination.
- If your child can't eat the food provided, send along a similar gluten-free food.

## Junior high and high school age

- Practice label reading with your child. Encourage your child to read food labels every time.
- Ask for a copy of the cafeteria or concession menu. Review the foods with your child and create a list of foods that are safe to eat.
- Come up with a list of questions with your child about how and where food is made. Your child can use this list to ask about cross-contamination.
- Work with your child to bring gluten-free foods on special event days or on field trips.
- Some classes involve making food. Talk with the teacher and find ways for your child to participate. Offer to send ingredients, such as gluten-free flour, so your child can make a gluten-free version of recipes made in class.
  - Ask if your child can have a separate desk or workstation to reduce their risk.

## More information

Browse resources on Celiac Canada ([celiac.ca](http://celiac.ca))

- [Resources for Children & Parents](#)
- [Celiac Disease: Teacher Tips](#)

## For support



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](http://ahs.ca/811).
- Check out [ahs.ca/Nutrition](http://ahs.ca/Nutrition).