

Celiac Disease and the Gluten Free Diet

A Quick Guide for Staff Working in a Healthcare Setting

Celiac Disease

Celiac Disease (CD) involves an immune response to gluten. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. For people with CD, eating gluten damages the small intestine and causes painful symptoms (e.g., diarrhea, nausea, stomach pain, headaches, bone/joint pain). The intestinal damage causes poor absorption of nutrients and increased risk of other conditions (e.g., cancer).

Diet

A strict gluten free (GF) diet is the only treatment for CD. This involves a lifelong avoidance of all foods that contain wheat, barley, rye, related cereal grains (e.g., bulgur, kamut, spelt, triticale), commercial oats, and all ingredients derived from these grains (e.g., wheat starch, malt). Some people with CD can tolerate pure uncontaminated oats, but commercial oats are unsafe because they may have come into contact with other grains that do contain gluten. A GF diet will help to heal the intestine, reduce symptoms, and lower the risk of osteoporosis, anemia, and cancer.

Sources of Gluten

Gluten is found in many prepared foods, including breads, cereals, pastas, processed meats, beer, and baked goods. It can also be a “hidden” ingredient in soups, sauces, salad dressings and packaged snack foods (check the label!). See the handout “Gluten-Free Diet Guidelines” for a list of unsafe, questionable, and safe grains and foods.

Gluten Free Foods

There are many foods that are naturally GF when not modified, such as vegetables, fruit, meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, nuts, seeds, milk, yogurt, and cheese. There are also a growing number of ready to eat GF foods and recipes that can help add variety to the GF diet

Cross Contamination

When preparing or serving GF foods, you must be careful to avoid contact with gluten containing foods. Even small amounts of gluten can cause intestinal damage and uncomfortable symptoms in a resident with CD. Special care must be taken to ensure that GF foods remain GF!

Preventing Cross Contamination of Gluten Free Foods For Unit Staff

Storage

- Use separate, airtight, clearly labeled containers to store GF food products.
- Have a separate spot in the cupboards, fridge and freezer to store GF items.

Meals and Snacks

- Wash hands well before handling GF foods, snacks, utensils and meal trays.
- Use a separate toaster, cutting boards and knives for GF items.
- Make sure the dining area is cleaned and free of crumbs.
- Prepare and serve GF meals/snacks before serving items with gluten.
- Use separate containers or individual portions of condiments (e.g., jam).
- Do not allow sharing of foods, condiments, cutlery or salt shakers at the table.
- Before serving meals and snacks, check to make sure they are GF.
- All supplies that may come into contact with GF food (plates, tongs, knives, cutlery, etc.) must be cleaned and sanitized before use.

Recreation Activities

- All staff should be aware of the GF diet and how to prevent cross-contamination.
- If having an event with food, make sure some GF items are available.
- Talk to the dietitian before doing any baking on the unit.

Caring For A Resident

- Talk to the resident and/or resident's family members to find out useful information about the resident's eating habits and preferences. The family may also be willing to bring in homemade or store-bought snacks/baking for the resident to enjoy.
- Provide the family with reassurance. Let them know that you are aware of CD and will do the best you can to provide the GF diet safely.
- Make sure the dietitian and food service manager at your site are aware that the resident requires a GF diet.
- Know which foods are allowed and not allowed on the GF diet.
- Be extra aware if the resident likes to wander or help themselves to snacks.

If you want to learn more about Celiac Disease or the Gluten Free Diet, ask a registered dietitian, or visit the Canadian Celiac Association website at www.celiac.ca

Preventing Cross Contamination of Gluten Free Foods For Food Service Staff

The Staff

- Wash hands well before handling GF foods, snacks, meal trays, and when switching tasks.
- Be extra alert when you have guests, volunteers or new staff working in the kitchen.

The Food

- Check the ingredient list on packaged foods to ensure they are GF. If you're not sure about a certain product, ask the dietitian or food service manager at your site.
- Use separate containers or individually wrapped portions for condiments, sauces and spreads (peanut butter, butter, jam, sour cream, etc.) to prevent "double dipping".
- Use potato starch or tapioca starch to thicken foods (instead of flour).
- Use pure spice blends rather than 'seasoning blends' that may contain gluten.
- There are many GF products that you can use (e.g., pizza crusts, pasta, breads).

The Equipment

- All utensils and equipment that will come into contact with GF food (tongs, pots, pans, thermometers, etc) must be cleaned and sanitized before use.
- Use a different toaster, cutting boards, knives, strainers, and wooden spoons for GF items.
- Bake GF items in a non-convection oven (or bake GF items on their own).

Meal Preparation

- Prepare and serve GF meals/snacks before preparing items with gluten.
- Make sure the counter area you will be using is cleaned, sanitized and free of crumbs.
- Avoid the use of fans while preparing GF foods. Cover all open containers (e.g., flour).
- Do not deep fry GF foods in same oil that was used for non-GF foods (e.g., fries).
- Use fresh water for boiling, poaching and steaming GF foods (e.g., pasta).
- When oven space is shared, place GF foods on the top oven rack.

Storage

- Have a separate (labeled) shelf in the fridge, freezer and dry storage area to store GF items.
- Store GF baked goods (breads, muffins, etc) in the freezer to prolong shelf life.
- Use separate, sealed containers or packages to store GF foods. Make sure containers that contain GF foods are clearly labeled (tip: use bright stickers or labels).

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