



# Understanding Your Student

GIG Education  
Bulletin

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## 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.

## 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*

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.

### **Classroom Activities**

Keep parents or guardians informed of classroom activities involving food. Working with parents or guardians to have the appropriate gluten-free substitutes will allow the child to participate in activities, rather than feeling left out or forgotten. An emergency supply of snacks and treats at school may be helpful.

The most important foods to avoid are those which are made from gluten-containing grains and flours: wheat, rye, barley, spelt, triticale and kamut. This is not a complete list. All products containing flour must be avoided. Safe grains and starches include rice, corn, potato, tapioca, bean, sorghum, soy, arrowroot and nut flours.

### **How Can I Help?**

The importance of communication between the parent(s) or guardian(s) and the teacher cannot be over-emphasized. As with all diseases, it is imperative that the teacher respect the wishes of the family. Children frequently share food. It is important that the classroom teacher be aware of food sharing when it involves the child with celiac disease.

Maintaining a gluten-free diet in a "gluten-filled" society is very difficult. The family and your student with celiac disease will certainly appreciate all of your support.

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*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 celiac disease or dermatitis herpetiformis. See your health care team for diagnosis and treatment options specifically for you.*

### **Local Contacts: Red River Celiacs GIG**

**Stacey Juhnke**, Branch Mgr.  
R.O.C.K.Coord.  
Fargo, ND  
701-237-4854

**Sandy Kohler**  
Moorhead, MN  
218-233-4898

**Susan Frykman**  
Lakes Area  
Elbow Lake, MN  
320-528-2404

**Deb Zaks**  
RRC GIG – North  
Grand Forks, ND  
701- 775-7402

[redriverceliacs@gluten.net](mailto:redriverceliacs@gluten.net)  
[www.redriverceliacs.org](http://www.redriverceliacs.org)

**Gluten Intolerance Group  
(GIG) of North America®**  
31214 124th Ave. S.E.  
Auburn, WA 98092-3667  
Phone: 253-833-6655  
Fax: 253-833-6675  
[www.GLUTEN.net](http://www.GLUTEN.net)  
[info@GLUTEN.net](mailto:info@GLUTEN.net)

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

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