



SCHOOL PACKET

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Communication in regard to your child's gluten-free requirements is vital to them staying healthy and safe at school.

Celiac disease is considered a disability under several laws and regulations including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), therefore, schools are required to make appropriate accommodations for your child.

This packet covers important aspects of navigating the school environment such as 504 plans, meals at school, celebrations, and art classes, and provide you tools to help you advocate for your child's needs.



504 PLANS



Information about 504 plans:

It is important that your school knows about your child's specific needs. If your child attends a public school or a charter school, they have the right to have a 504 plan that lists accommodations tailored to a child with celiac disease.

Here are some suggestions for working with your school:

- **Get a letter from your child's doctor that states their diagnosis and need for a gluten-free diet to give to your school with a formal request to initiate a 504 plan.**
- **Be prepared to talk to your child's school nurse, teacher, art teacher, and food service department.**

Ask about:

- Meals and snacks at school
- Is sharing of food allowed?
- Cleaning practices
- Seating arrangements - will your child have adequate space to prevent cross-contact with gluten during meals?
- Celebrations - are foods allowed?
- Art classes and supplies - do they contain gluten, such as papier mâché, and Play-Doh?



STEPS TO A 504 PLAN

It is recommended that students with celiac disease have a 504 plan. A 504 plan is for students that do not need a special education plan but have other barriers that may prevent them from learning. Follow the steps below, as well as any specific directions from your school and you will be on your way to getting a 504 plan!



1

GET DOCUMENTATION OF DIAGNOSIS

Request an official letter from your child's doctor that informs the school of your child's diagnosis of celiac disease.

IDENTIFY THE 504 PLAN COORDINATOR

Find out who the coordinator of the 504 plan is at your child's school. This can be found on the school website or call the school administrator and ask.



2



3

REQUEST A 504 PLAN

A 504 plan has to be requested in writing. Write that you want to initiate a 504 plan for your child due to their diagnosis of celiac disease. Sign and date the letter and send it to the 504 plan coordinator.

EVALUATION

The school will initiate an evaluation of your child and go over their academic and medical records. They may also interview your child and their teacher.



4



5

MEET TO DEVELOP PLAN

A meeting will be scheduled to discuss and develop an appropriate plan for your child. The meeting usually includes the coordinator, the child's teacher, and parents. Make sure to review the plan at least yearly with any updates.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR 504 PLANS



Example accommodations:

- Avoid all foods containing wheat, barley, rye, and commercial oats.
- Contact parents at least seven days before any event/celebration that involves food or food in the curriculum so that a gluten-free alternative can be arranged.
- Provide parents with labels at least seven days ahead of time of any foods that are going to be served at events/celebrations or used in the curriculum, so that they can be evaluated for gluten content.
- Use gluten-free alternatives to Play-Doh and papier mâché and avoid being in an environment where flour is dispersed into the air such as baking.
- Ensure student washes hands with soap and water after art activities or when using food in the curriculum.
- Ensure student washes hands with soap and water before eating. Note that hand sanitizer will not remove gluten.
- Ensure student has a seating arrangement during meals that allows adequate space to prevent cross-contact with gluten.
- Ensure work and eating surfaces are cleaned with water and detergent and kept free of crumbs and debris.
- Allow student unrestricted use of the restroom.
- Allow student time off to recover from gluten exposure.
- Allow student extended time to complete assignments or take tests due to recovery from gluten exposure.
- Allow student to have a "go bag" at school. This could include but not limited to fresh change of clothes, personal care wipes, sealed plastic bag for dirty clothes.



SCHOOL LUNCH FAQs



The frequently asked questions below mostly address public and charter schools, both of which are required to follow the same regulations for school meals. About 90 percent of K-12 students in the United States attend public or charter schools and about 10 percent attend private schools.

Note: Each individual is treated on a case-by-case basis. Therefore, the school should work with the parents and the student to come up with suitable solutions. Implementing a 504 plan will give you more opportunity to tailor and communicate specific dietary needs of your child.

Question:

Are there laws and regulations protecting children with celiac disease in relation to school meal accommodations?

Answer: YES

For public, private, and charter schools (some exceptions for religious private schools):

- The Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Title III under The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- USDA Regulatory Requirements



SCHOOL LUNCH FAQs:



Question:

My child has celiac disease and attends public school. Our school says we have to bring a packed lunch daily as they cannot accommodate a gluten-free diet. Does my child have the right to have gluten-free meals at school?

Answer: YES

If your child attends a public school, they have to provide your child with a safe gluten-free meal, free of cross contact. Celiac disease is considered a disability, and as such they have to make provisions for your child. However, you may be required to provide a written medical statement from your doctor that states the necessity for a gluten-free diet. If you already have a 504 plan in place for celiac disease, then the medical statement may not be required.

Question:

My child has celiac disease and attends a private school, do they have to accommodate the gluten-free diet?

Answer: YES, with 1 exception

Unless it is a religious K-12 School that does not receive federal funding, federal law requires public, private, and charter k-12 schools to provide gluten-free meals to children with celiac disease if they offer meals to their students.

Question:

I would like my child with celiac disease to eat meals at school. The school has requested we provide them with a medical statement from our doctor. Are they allowed to ask for this? If so, what information has to be included in the medical statement?

SCHOOL LUNCH FAQs:



Answer: YES

They can ask you to provide a medical statement. However, if you already have a 504 plan in place for celiac disease this can be used in place of the medical statement. A medical statement has to include three things:

- The allergen or food to be avoided
- A brief explanation of how the exposure affects the child (medical reaction)
- Recommended substitutes

Note that a medical statement only has to state the necessity for a gluten-free diet, the statement does not have to mention a diagnosis.

Question:

My child attends public school and has non-celiac gluten sensitivity (NCGS), our school says they can only accommodate a gluten-free diet for those with celiac disease. Does my child have the right to gluten-free meals at school?

Answer: YES

The school has to provide your child with a safe gluten-free meal free of cross contact. Like celiac disease, NCGS is also considered a disability by the ADA, and as such they have to accommodate your child.

However, you may be required to provide a written medical statement from your doctor that states the necessity of a gluten-free diet. If you already have a 504 plan in place that states the necessity the medical statement may not be required.

Question:

The school serves pizza every Friday, is my child entitled to gluten-free pizza?

Answer: NO

The meal does not have to mirror the regular menu offering of the day, it only has to meet the specific nutrient guidelines that are required by the USDA.

SCHOOL LUNCH FAQs:



Question:

Can I request a certain brand of pasta or bread for my child?

Answer: NO

You may not request certain brands, only if there is a specific medical reason for using this particular brand.

Question:

My child does not want to eat at school every day. Can they still get a gluten-free meal on the days they decide they want to eat the school meal?

Answer: YES

The school has to provide your child with a safe, gluten-free meal free of cross contact, even if they choose to participate in the school lunch program occasionally. Celiac disease is considered a disability, and therefore the school has make provisions for your child. However, you may be required to provide a written medical statement from your doctor that states the necessity for a gluten-free diet. If you already have a 504 plan that states the necessity the medical statement may not be required.

If your child only has a meal occasionally, you may need to give advance notice to the food service department on/about the days that your child wants to eat school meals.

References

1. Council for American Private Education (CAPE). CAPE Website. Updated 2018. Accessed December 11, 2018.
2. US Department of Agriculture (USDA). Accommodating Children with Disabilities in the School Meal Programs. Published July 25, 2017. Accessed December 10, 2018.
3. Attorneys Andrew Rozynski and David John Hommel; Partners in Law at Eisenberg & Baum, LLP. Accessed April 18, 2024.

PACKED LUNCH TIPS



Pick at least one item from each category to make packing lunches a snap. Try to pack the night ahead to reduce stress in the morning rush. If you are super organized, prepare all components on Sundays for the week ahead. Using a “bento” style lunch box makes packing your lunch a breeze.

Make sure to read all labels for gluten-free status.

Proteins

- Canned salmon salad (instead of tuna which is high in toxic mercury)
- Chicken salad
- Cold bean salad
- Hard-boiled eggs
- Hummus
- Lunch meat
- Nut or seed butters such as sunflower or peanut butter (lots of schools do not allow nut/peanut butters, but sunflower butter is a great alternative)
- Tofu

Grains/Starches

Tip: Try to pick labeled GF whole grains - they are more nutritious!

- GF corn tortillas
- GF muffins
- GF pasta
- GF pretzels
- GF whole grain bagel
- GF whole grain bread
- GF whole grain cereal
- GF whole grain crackers
- Quinoa
- Sweet corn



PACKED LUNCH TIPS



Dairy/Dairy Alternatives

- Cheese/cheese sticks
- Cottage cheese
- Lactaid milk for lactose intolerance
- Milk
- Soy, coconut or almond milk for dairy intolerance/allergies
- Yogurt/Greek yogurt (frozen sticks stay cold longer)

Fruits

- Apples
- Applesauce
- All types of berries - strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, etc.
- All types of melon - watermelon, cantaloupe, honeydew, etc.
- Bananas
- Dried fruit
- Fruit pouches
- Grapes
- Oranges - clementines and mandarins are easy to peel and eat.

Veggies

Tip: Using whole "mini" versions of veggies eliminates the need to cut them up so they will be crisper and less mushy than cut up veggies. Pick as many as you want from this category.

- Carrot sticks
- Celery sticks
- Cherry tomatoes
- Fresh or cooked green beans
- Lettuce wraps
- Mini peppers
- Mini cucumbers
- Snow peas/snap peas



ART CLASSES



Art and craft supplies can contain gluten. Even though gluten cannot penetrate the skin, it is important to know if your child will be handling supplies containing gluten. It is always better to work with a gluten-free version of the product.

Hand washing carefully after using the product is adequate for older children who do not put their hands in their mouths, unless the product could be dispersed through the air, such as loose flours and grains. They present a risk as they could be accidentally ingested or make their way to the digestive tract through the mouth, nose and throat.

Younger children, especially, should never play with any supplies containing gluten, given the high risk of them putting their hands in their mouths.

Here are some art supplies commonly used that contain gluten (this is not a complete list):

- **Play-Doh**
- **Papier mâché**
- **Pasta and cereals**
- **Loose flours and grains (also common in sensory tables)**
- **Bird seed**

It is important to have a discussion with your child's teacher and art teacher about the probability that art supplies and foods in the curriculum will contain gluten. Advise them to notify you ahead of time so that an appropriate alternative can be provided for your child or preferably the whole class. Consider using popcorn kernels, rice or other gluten-free grains. Also make sure that adequate cleaning practices are followed after activities. It is recommended to wipe down surfaces carefully with a water and detergent solution. Disinfecting wipes may not be effective enough.

CELEBRATIONS AT SCHOOL



Although celebrations and classroom parties can present challenges, planning ahead can make the event fun. This could be a perfect time to educate your child's class on why they cannot eat something that will make them sick. Provide gluten-free options for the class to try as well to let them taste how yummy gluten-free food can be!

Many schools have switched to non-food celebrations to protect students with food allergies, as well as to promote healthier lifestyles. Ask your school about their policy. Possible suggestions for non-food items could include but not limited to:

- **Pencils**
- **Fun erasers**
- **Stickers**
- **Plastic stamps**
- **Stretchy animals**

Having a 504-plan with accommodations for celebrations is strongly recommended if your child attends a school that allows food celebrations.

Suggestions for accommodations

- Notify parents ahead of time (seven days is recommended) if there is going to be a celebration with food or foods used in the curriculum. This will allow you time to suggest or provide alternatives.
- Provide parents with labels ahead of time (seven days is recommended) for any foods that are going to be served or used in the curriculum. Some parents provide snacks and treats for the school to keep for unplanned celebrations. However, keep in mind that all snacks and treats need to be stored properly to prevent cross-contact with gluten.
- Also, make sure that they are labeled clearly with your child's name, classroom identification, and the date.

WELLNESS POLICIES



Does your school have a wellness policy?

Public and charter schools are required to have a wellness policy that includes clear instructions for classroom parties, celebrations and foods given as incentives. Schools are also required to have a wellness committee to determine the guidelines within the wellness policy. If you want to impact your school district's policies, the best way is to join the wellness committee or petition the committee to institute a non-food celebration policy.

Read more about wellness policies here: <https://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/local-school-wellness-policy>



RESOURCES:



Raising Our Celiac Kids (ROCK) - Kids and Teens -
<https://nationalceliac.org/raising-our-celiac-kids-rock/>

National Celiac Association (NCA)
<https://nationalceliac.org/>

Information about 504 plans:
U.S. Department of Education
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>

For 504 plan complaints:
U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>

For ADA complaints:
U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division
https://www.ada.gov/filing_complaint.htm

Information about school meals and disabilities:
US Department of Agriculture (USDA): Accommodating Children with Disabilities in the School Meal Programs
<https://www.fns.usda.gov/cn/accommodating-dietary-needs-schools>



Dear Teacher,

A student in your class has been diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder called celiac disease. While this will affect some aspects of school management, patience and understanding can bring about the necessary changes that will quickly become a natural part of the school experience for all involved.

What is celiac disease?

Celiac disease (CeD) is a genetic autoimmune condition that mainly affects the gastrointestinal tract when gluten is ingested. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley and rye and most commercial oats. When someone with CeD eats gluten, the lining of the small intestine becomes damaged and is unable to absorb nutrients properly. CeD may also affect other organ systems.

How will this affect your classroom?

Even the tiniest amount of wheat, rye, barley or contaminated oats is toxic to a person with CeD. Therefore, we are relying on your help to keep our child safe while at school.

Here are some steps that will help:

- If there will be shared food (for example, for celebrations or rewards) in the classroom, please notify us in advance so that we can provide a safe alternative for our child.
- We may wish to keep a supply of gluten-free snacks at school for our child.
- Please help keep our child safe from cross-contact by encouraging hand washing before and after the students eat.
- Please do not allow gluten-containing items such as Play-Doh or flour for art or baking projects to be on a surface from where my child might eat.
- Please let me know if there will be Play-Doh or if you are planning to do any flour-based art or baking projects so that I can provide a gluten-free version.
- Please clean contact surfaces with detergent and water to prevent accidental cross-contact.

Thank you in advance for your sensitivity and for helping us to keep our child safe this school year. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Dear Food Service Staff,

A student in your school has been diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder called celiac disease. While this will affect some aspects of school management, including food preparation, patience and understanding can bring about the necessary changes that will quickly become a natural part of the school experience for all involved.

What is celiac disease?

Celiac disease (CeD) is a genetic autoimmune condition that mainly affects the gastrointestinal tract when gluten is ingested. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley, rye, and most commercial oats. When someone with CeD eats gluten, the lining of the small intestine becomes damaged and is unable to absorb nutrients properly. CeD may also affect other organ systems.

How will this affect your job?

Even the tiniest amount of wheat, rye, barley or contaminated oats is toxic to a person with CeD, and this can make food preparation, especially in a commercial-type kitchen, a challenge. It is not impossible, however, and by learning these simple ABC's you will be able to provide safe and enjoyable meals for the student with celiac disease.

Always offer foods that are free of wheat, rye, barley and contaminated oats. **Be** aware of hidden wheat, rye, barley and contaminated oats in processed foods. **Clean** utensils and work surfaces are necessary. A kitchen prep sheet with more information on this is available for your convenience. Contact the parent/guardian or the National Celiac Association if you have questions or concerns.

The information contained in this material is not intended to be all-inclusive. It is provided to help you understand the importance of caution and preparation when working with a person with celiac disease.

The goal is to provide an environment where the child with celiac disease can learn self-management skills without being consumed by the illness.

Thank you for your help and support.

Sincerely,

GF MEAL PREPARATION GUIDELINES FOR FOOD SERVICES



In addition to avoiding wheat, barley, rye and contaminated oats when serving someone that follows a gluten-free (GF) diet, it is essential to avoid all contact with gluten.

- Train all staff in GF procedures and re-train whenever there is a change in staffing or management.
- Assign one staff member to prepare GF meals at each shift.
- Where possible, establish a dedicated GF station in the kitchen.
- Clean all surfaces, including counters and cooking surfaces.
- Staff should wash hands, re-glove and wear a clean apron before starting a GF order.
- Read all labels to determine GF status of all ingredients used.
- Use clean equipment, utensils and tools. Using dedicated color-coded equipment preferred.
- Difficult to clean items MUST be dedicated e.g. colander, sieve, and equipment made from porous materials e.g. wood utensils.
- Use aluminum foil when toasting or grilling on non-dedicated equipment. Cook GF items separately in the oven and turn convection feature off.
- Use a dedicated fryer with clean oil when deep frying.
- Do not steam or warm vegetables in pasta water or over pasta pots.
- Store GF items separate and above GF foods.
- Keep foods separate and away from other foods while serving.

