



Community Health Connections

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Fact Sheet

Gluten Free Diet

Celiac Disease is a digestive condition triggered by the consumption of the protein gluten. Gluten is found in bread, pasta, cookies, pizza crust, flour and any other foods containing wheat, barley or rye.

With Celiac Disease, if you eat foods containing gluten, an immune reaction occurs in the small intestine causing damage to the surface of the small intestine and the inability to absorb certain nutrients. Eventually, the decreased absorption of nutrients can cause vitamin deficiencies that deprive your brain, peripheral nervous system, bones, liver and other organs of vital nourishment. This can lead to other illnesses and stunt growth in children.

Important points to remember:

- People diagnosed with Celiac Disease cannot tolerate gluten, a protein found in wheat, rye, and barley
- No medications to treat Celiac Disease, only a gluten free diet to control symptoms of disease
- Untreated Celiac Disease damages the small intestine and interferes with nutrient absorption
- A dietician and support group can help with food selection, label reading, and other strategies to help manage the disease
- A gluten-free diet is a lifetime requirement

Gluten free diet guidelines:

- Talk to a physician and dietician (who can review gluten-free diet and other nutritional needs)
- Look at the foods you already have in your home (many items may already be gluten-free)
- Start planning meals around naturally gluten-free foods
- Make a shopping list from a weekly menu
- When going to the grocery store, the fresh produce section is a great place to start. Stock up on plenty of fruits and vegetables.
- The fresh meat section is all naturally gluten-free. Use caution with **processed meats** they may contain gluten as fillers or flavor enhancers – (always read the label carefully).
- Eggs and dairy section - these are for the most part gluten-free
- The inner isles of the grocery store have products such as plain rice, corn tortillas, dried beans, peanut butter and etc

Grocery stores are starting to carry more gluten-free items to due to demand – check your local grocery stores. Gluten can also be found in some medications. Always check with your physician and pharmacist about medications that may contain wheat. It is very important to read all labels. Even everyday items such as lipsticks, toothpaste and play dough contain gluten.

For additional information on a gluten-free diet, visit www.celiac.org or contact us at 724-283-0990.