

Dear Teacher,

A student in your class has celiac disease. This letter will help you understand what Celiac Disease is and what changes might be needed in the classroom. Once you know what to look for, these changes will feel like a normal part of the school day.

What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac Disease is a lifelong autoimmune condition that runs in families. It can develop in both children and adults. When someone with celiac disease eats a protein called gluten, their immune system attacks the lining of the small intestine. The small intestine is the part of the body that absorbs nutrients from food. When it gets damaged, the body cannot get the vitamins and minerals it needs, which can cause many health problems.

Gluten is found in wheat, barley, and rye and in many foods made from these grains. Pure oats that are certified gluten-free are safe for most people with celiac disease, but some children may still need to avoid them. Please check with the parent/guardian about whether this student can have oats.

What are the symptoms?

If this student eats or comes into contact with gluten, they may have symptoms such as:

- Stomach pain or bloating
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Feeling very tired
- Trouble paying attention
- Headaches
- Skin rashes (small, itchy blisters called [dermatitis herpetiformis](#))

How is Celiac Disease treated?

The only treatment is to completely avoid gluten for life. This might sound simple, but gluten is hidden in many things — not just food. It can be found in food additives, flavorings, some personal care products, and certain school supplies. Because of this, some changes may be needed in the classroom and other parts of the school to keep this student safe.

Even a tiny amount of gluten can trigger an immune reaction inside the body. Sometimes there are no obvious symptoms, but the damage is still happening. Over time, repeated gluten exposure can lead to serious health problems, including nutritional deficiencies, weakened bones, and other chronic conditions. This is why strict avoidance is so important, even when the child "feels fine."

Whose job is it?

The student should learn to make safe choices about what to eat and touch at school. A child who was just diagnosed may need extra help learning what is safe and what is not. Older children usually need less support. Younger children may need a teacher or staff member to check labels for them. The goal is to help the child feel confident about living gluten-free.

Feelings and emotions

Being told you can never eat many of your favorite foods again is hard. Research shows that children with celiac disease are more likely to experience anxiety, sadness, and social difficulties than their peers. You might notice:

- Sadness or mood changes
- Not wanting to eat
- Trouble focusing
- Pulling away from friends
- Sometimes trying foods they know contain gluten

These feelings are a normal part of adjusting. Encouraging inclusion, such as planning class celebrations that include gluten-free options, can make a big difference. If emotional or behavioral concerns persist, the parent/guardian and care team should be notified.

How might Celiac Disease affect the classroom?

Attendance: The student should come to school regularly, but there may be times when symptoms keep them home or away from class. They may also need to leave for doctor visits during school hours.

Cafeteria: The cafeteria staff should know about this student's needs and try to offer safe, gluten-free meal choices. If that is not possible, the parent/guardian should send a packed lunch. It is important that table surfaces are wiped clean of crumbs or leftover food that may contain gluten. Washing tables with soap and water is the most effective way to remove gluten.

Field trips and off-site events: Any chaperones should be told about the student's dietary needs before the trip.

Restroom: This student may need to use the restroom quickly and without waiting if symptoms like diarrhea start suddenly. If the student touches something with gluten in it, they will need to wash their hands with soap and water right away. Symptoms may take some time to go away.

Art class: Some popular brands of clay, crayons, paste, Play-Doh, and paint contain gluten. Please contact the parent/guardian for a list of safe alternatives. If a project uses pasta, cereal, or other food items with gluten, corn or rice pasta can be used instead. For students with the skin rash form of celiac disease, latex gloves and balloons may also cause problems — please check with the parent/guardian.

Drama/Theater: Some types of stage makeup may contain ingredients made from wheat, barley, or rye. Check with the manufacturer or the parent/guardian before using these products.

Physical education: Unless the student has symptoms like extreme tiredness, bone or joint pain, or other physical problems, they can take part in PE just like everyone else.

A few final notes

This letter does not cover everything, but it should help you understand why being careful matters. The goal is to create a classroom where this student can learn to manage their health while still feeling like a regular part of the class. An environment that supports good decision-making will help the student do well both in school and outside of it.

Thank you for your help and support.