



# SUPPORTING A CHILD WITH COELIAC DISEASE

**It's natural for any parent or carer of a child with coeliac disease to be concerned about the possible health or dietary problems their child may encounter when away from home.**

Starting school, going to parties and getting involved in more food based activities may seem daunting, but with a little forward planning, there is no reason why these challenges can't be overcome.

## **Nursery, playgroup or school**

Starting or changing nursery, playgroup or school is a big step for you and your child. Make sure you provide the adults, childminders or teachers who are looking after them with as much information as possible. This will help to reduce the likelihood of problems and make sure your child adapts well to each new experience.

Before your child starts, make an appointment to see the person in charge, as well as any relevant teaching and catering staff. Let them know that your child has coeliac disease and needs to follow a strict gluten free diet.

Download our schools' pack at [www.coeliac.org.uk/schools](http://www.coeliac.org.uk/schools) for comprehensive information on managing coeliac disease in school, to share with the school.

You can provide them with information about foods that can be eaten and those that must be avoided. Remember that young children often make mistakes or swap food with other children so it is important that staff are vigilant.

Let the staff know what symptoms to expect if gluten is eaten. Also explain the long term effects of not keeping to a gluten free diet, such as continued gut damage and poor absorption of nutrients.

Below is a useful checklist of things to cover with your childcare provider:

- explain what coeliac disease is and that once a child with coeliac disease follows a strict gluten free diet they will feel better
- highlight that coeliac disease is not contagious nor an allergy, emphasising that they will not suffer a life threatening anaphylactic reaction
- explain what will happen if your child eats gluten by mistake so they are aware of what to expect. The most common symptoms include diarrhoea, nausea, tummy ache and wind
- clarify what foods can be eaten and what foods need to be avoided – it may be useful to provide them with a copy of the Your gluten free life booklet and the Gluten free Checklist.

## **Playtime**

Gluten has to be eaten to cause symptoms, so using paints, crayons and glues should not be a problem unless your child accidentally eats them. As young children will often put things in their mouth, using materials made with no gluten containing ingredients is a sensible option.

Preschool children will often make art and instruments with dried pasta. As this may be tempting for small children, it is advisable to use gluten free pasta or supervise the child.

Play dough is not always gluten free. However, it is easy to make play dough using ingredients that don't contain gluten. Find our recipe online at: [www.coeliac.org.uk/playdough](http://www.coeliac.org.uk/playdough).

## **Cookery lessons in primary school**

Children often make small cakes or cookies



If you feel you're not getting the support that you would like, have a chat with your local dietitian who may be able to speak to the school on your behalf.

### School trips and special occasions

If your child is going on a residential school trip, call ahead and speak to the cook or person providing the meals and talk to the teacher in charge of the trip to explain your child's dietary needs.

Pack basic items such as gluten free bread and crackers so that your child has some emergency supplies. This is recommended for any trip away from home.

### Going to a party

It's worth bearing in mind that the party organiser will probably be very busy on the day, so don't automatically expect them to cater for your child. Discuss your child's dietary requirements with them in advance.

If they are unable to cater for your child ask what type of food is being prepared so you can substitute similar gluten free versions. Perhaps you could take along gluten free alternatives for everyone to try so your child feels included.

as part of the curriculum and, with some forward planning, there is no reason why your child cannot take part.

### Cross contamination

Before your child takes part in cookery lessons it may be useful to speak to the teacher about cross contamination. Top tips to avoid cross contamination:

- keep all utensils separate during preparation and cooking of gluten free food
- don't fry gluten free food in the same oil as foods that contain gluten
- use a clean grill pan, separate toaster or toaster bags when making gluten free toast
- be careful when preparing gluten free food in a floury environment.

### School meal times

There are universal free school meal policies for certain school years in England and Scotland schools. In addition, free school meals are available to some children depending on individual circumstances, for example the receipt of certain types of benefits. If a child is entitled to a free school meal, they should not be excluded because they have coeliac disease.

If you want your child to have a lunch which is provided by the nursery or school, speak to the catering staff about suitable choices and providing gluten free alternatives. Discuss adjustments or alternatives that they could make to their normal weekly menu, and speak to the catering staff about cross contamination.

Visit [www.coeliac.org.uk/schools](http://www.coeliac.org.uk/schools) to download an information pack and resources to help you liaise with schools about your child's gluten free requirements. You may prefer to provide your own food which can be heated up or a packed lunch. Make sure your child knows not to swap items in their packed lunch with their friends, in case they swap them for something that contains gluten. Encourage them to double check any food they are unsure of.

To avoid your child feeling different from other youngsters at snack times, you may need to provide gluten free snacks. Inform staff that these snacks should be stored separately to avoid contact with food that contains gluten.

Visit [www.coeliac.org.uk](http://www.coeliac.org.uk)  
or call us on **0333 332 2033**  
for more information.

Whether you're eating out on the move, in restaurants, or shopping for gluten free food for you and your family, look out for our trusted symbols which mean we're working for you to make things better.



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☎ 0333 332 2033  
f facebook.com/CoeliacUK  
t @Coeliac\_UK  
i @CoeliacUK

Registered office: Coeliac UK,  
3rd Floor Apollo Centre,  
Desborough Road, High  
Wycombe, Bucks HP11 2QW.  
Tel: 01494 437278  
Fax: 01494 474349

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