

neco
New England
Celiac Organization
Education & Advocacy for the Gluten-free Community



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Gluten Free College Survival Guide

Heading off to college? For those with celiac disease, your first time away from home can be challenging. Follow these ten steps and your college experience will be a lot easier!

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www.neceliac.org

1 Tell people about your dietary needs

Your resident advisor, academic advisor, the dean of students, the school nurse are all committed to your academic and social success. They can't help if they don't know about your dietary requirements. Don't be afraid to tell them...they want to help.

Be specific! Gluten free means different things to different people. Some think it's a fad diet, (most) others don't understand the issue of cross-contamination. Few people know how serious it is. For some celiacs, "just a little" gluten will result in several days of gastric distress. Explain to your RA, to the dean, to the head of the food service that "gluten free" means 100% gluten free.



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2 Partner with the head of the campus food service



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In our experience, establishing a good gluten free environment for yourself on campus will require ongoing diligence. While the school and food service administration will want to help you, they need regular reminders and feedback on how the process is going. They may have great intent; however they will not be there to oversee the process every time a meal gets served. Work to ensure that they define and maintain a good process...and that the food service line workers are also aware of your needs and handle your food properly.

3 Follow up

If you have a good experience, let the food service know. If you think you've been glutened, let the food service know. If you've gotten the same chicken over rice meal for six days in a row, let the food service know.

Document your experience in a journal - if you were glutened, record what you ate, when you ate it, where you got it, and the impact on you. How long were you sick? Did you miss classes? With this documentation, the school administration and food service will be more likely to make the necessary changes.

You are paying good money for your meal plan; you deserve the same healthy, well-rounded diet that others are receiving.



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4 When in doubt, ask

If you're not sure that a food item is gluten free, ask. If you're not sure that an item has not been cross-contaminated, ask. It's your health at stake. Be nice. Explain why it's important that you're asking, and that your food be 100% gluten free.

5 Make friends with the food service staff

The food service staff, particularly those who prepare and deliver food, can be your strong allies. If you treat them nicely, and let them know what you need, they may go out of their way to find gluten free options and to verify that your food has not been cross-contaminated.



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6 Explain celiac disease to your new friends



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No, you're not weird because you have celiac. No, they can't catch it. Your meals may take longer to prepare or you may need to do some research on a local restaurant before you go out. Yes, it's important. If they are good friends, even though you may have just met them, they will understand and stick around while you wait for your meal. You'd do the same for them, right?

7 Find other celiacs on campus

Even at a small school, others with celiac or gluten intolerance are facing similar issues. Post a message, ask around, get a group together to discuss your experiences and to meet with the food service. Make sure that others are documenting their experiences. Strength in numbers!



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8 Be Prepared

You will miss an occasional meal due to academic, social, or sports activities. Keep a small supply of gluten free food in your dorm room - healthy snacks, frozen meals that can be heated in your microwave, etc.

And remind your coach that pizzas on the bus after the game won't work for you; he or she will make other plans for you...if they know that you need something different!



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9 Enjoy the experience

College is a time for personal, social and academic growth. Look at this as an opportunity to build your advocacy, social, organizational and negotiation skills. You must be your own advocate...building these skills will help you to be successful both on campus and after you graduate!



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10 When all else fails, call in the troops

The law is on your side. The Department of Justice ruled in 2012 that colleges must provide gluten-free and allergen-free food options. If your school is failing to provide you with a healthy diet, escalate the conversation. Go to the Dean of Students. Call a meeting with the President of the school. Go see the head of the food service. Stage a sit-in in front of the cafeteria!

Remember, you are the customer, and it's their job to serve *you*, and it's their *legal requirement* to provide "safe" meal options. Again...be nice and learn how you can influence people to "do the right thing." Identify and engage the individuals at school who can make a difference, and keep advocating for yourself (and your fellow celiacs) until you get what you are entitled to!

About New England Celiac Organization:

New England Celiac Organization (www.neceliac.org) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to educating and advocating for individuals with celiac disease and non-celiac gluten sensitivities, their families, and communities throughout New England. NECO provides education, awareness, and support for persons with celiac and the medical community through in-person events and the online community.

What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac disease (CD) is an autoimmune disease that mainly affects the gastrointestinal tract. Individuals who have CD are permanently intolerant to gluten, a group of proteins found in wheat, barley, and rye.

Gluten is toxic to those with CD. In a person with undiagnosed or untreated CD, the finger-like ridges that line the walls of the small intestine known as villi become flattened and unable to absorb nutrients properly. CD may also affect other organ systems.

What is Gluten Intolerance or Non Celiac Gluten Sensitivity?

Gluten Intolerance (GI) or Non Celiac Gluten Sensitivity (NCGS) encompasses a collection of medical conditions in which gluten has an adverse effect on the body. Unlike celiac disease, damage to the small intestine does not occur, but symptoms can range from mild to severe and include diarrhea, vomiting, and migraines.

Following a gluten free diet can reduce or eliminate these symptoms.

For More Information

For more information about the recent college study or to learn more about coping with Celiac Disease, please visit www.neceliac.org.

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