

Children on a Gluten Free Diet

It's natural for any parent or full-time carer of a child on a gluten free diet to be concerned about possible health or dietary problems their child may encounter – especially when the child's day to day activities are increasingly spent away from home. Getting involved in more food based activities may seem challenging, but with some forward planning, there is no reason that these obstacles cannot be overcome.

Starting day-care/kindy/school

Starting day-care, kindy, or school is a big step for you and your child. Make sure you provide the teachers/carers with as much information as possible. This will help reduce the likelihood of problems and help your child adapt more easily.

Advice for parents and carers

Before your child attends day-care, kindy or school.

Make an appointment to see the person in charge, as well as any relevant teaching staff. Inform them that your child is on a gluten free diet and explain the importance of a gluten free diet. Also get to know the policy on food sharing and how it is enforced.

Provide information about foods which are safe and those which must be avoided. You can provide the school or day-care facility with a copy of the handout 'Advice for childcare providers or schools'. Please contact us to request additional copies if needed.

Young children often make mistakes or swap food with other children, so staff need to be vigilant. Letting staff know what symptoms to expect if gluten is eaten is a good idea, as is explaining the long term effects of not adhering to a gluten free diet

Playtime

To cause any symptoms, gluten has to be consumed, so using art materials such as crayons, pencils, paint and glues should not be a problem unless your child inadvertently eats them. As young children tend to put things in their mouth, using materials with no gluten containing ingredients would be a preferable choice.



Younger primary school students sometimes make art and crafts with uncooked pasta. In these cases, it would be advisable to use gluten free pasta or ensure that the child is supervised.

Play dough is not always gluten free. However, it is easy to make your own playdough using ingredients that don't contain gluten.

Checklist of things to cover with teaching staff:

1. Explain what coeliac disease is and that once your child follows a strict gluten free diet, they will feel better and be healthier
2. Emphasise that coeliac disease is not contagious nor an allergy – highlighting the fact that they will not suffer a life threatening anaphylactic reaction
3. However, explain what will happen if you child accidentally eats gluten. This will ensure that they are aware of what to expect (e.g. common symptoms such as diarrhoea, nausea, etc.)
4. Outline what foods can and cannot be eaten – it may be useful to print out one of our pages from “Common sources of gluten” or “How to eat gluten free”.

Going to a party

It is worth bearing in mind that it can be imposing to expect the party organiser to cater for your child on a gluten free diet. Discuss your child’s dietary requirements in advance, and if they are unable to cater for your child – ask what type of food is being prepared, so you can create similar gluten free versions. You could even take gluten free alternatives for everyone to taste, so that your child feels included!

Food suggestions for packed lunches

The items in **green** are good sources of calcium.

Gluten free fillings: choose from **cream cheese, cottage cheese, cheese spread**, peanut butter, chocolate spread, egg, cheese, ham, chicken, bacon, tuna, sardines, salmon, prawns, jam.

Good sources of protein: **chunks of cheese**, gluten free sausages, gluten free chicken pieces/nuggets, gluten free battered fish, fish, hummus, hard boiled eggs, and corn chips

Fruit and vegetables: sticks of carrot, cucumber, celery, pepper, mini tomatoes, baby sweetcorn, fresh fruit such as bananas, apples, oranges, plums, a handful of grapes or small packets of ready prepared fruit, dried fruit such as mini packs of raisins, sultanas or apricots, fruit leather straps
To provide some **carbohydrate** try: rice cakes, rice crackers, rice salads, egg fried rice, gluten free pizza, gluten free pasta, potato dishes, bean salad.

And for a **sweet treat:** **yoghurt**, mousse, fruit bars, gluten free muffins/cakes, gluten free bars, chocolate bars, and jelly.

Remember always check food labels to confirm that product is gluten free.