



5 steps to going gluten free

BEING NEWLY DIAGNOSED with celiac disease or non-celiac gluten sensitivity is overwhelming, entailing one to adopt considerable lifestyle changes. While it is a relief to finally learn the cause of the symptoms that have plagued you for years, now comes the hard part—the research. Following a gluten-free diet is the only treatment for these autoimmune disorders because there is no cure; food—the right food—is the only medicine.

Learning about gluten is the first of many steps on the road to transitioning to a gluten-free lifestyle. Not diet, lifestyle. This process takes time and patience because the answers are sometimes complicated. Anything that touches your lips or goes in your mouth must be gluten free, including over-the-counter medicine, makeup (lip gloss, lipstick, etc.), mouthwash, toothpaste, alcohol and, of course, food.

There is no magic formula for transitioning to a gluten-free lifestyle, but there are a number of ways to tackle it head on and put you in the driver's seat, feeling empowered and in control. Here are five tips:



1 Consult with a knowledgeable dietitian to address vitamin deficiencies, learn about nutritious gluten-free grains and ingredients, and find out how to maintain a healthy weight.

2 Learn about gluten, how to read labels and shop, and how to communicate your dietary needs to servers, co-workers, friends and family.

3 Adhere to a strict gluten-free diet—without cheating—or risk more medical issues down the road.

4 Join a local support group, because socializing with others who have the same or similar issues allows you to feel included and less isolated. It is also a great way to make new friends, learn about gluten-free-friendly restaurants and get the scoop on the best places to grocery shop.

5 Follow up annually with a gastroenterologist and dietitian to keep your health on track. Vitamin deficiencies need to be monitored, and any other health issues should be addressed.

National support groups host the best websites for research. These sites work to bring timely and accurate information to the gluten-free community, and they don't perpetuate myths and misinformation. They work with the medical community to address new research and trends as well as advocate for the gluten-free community.

- Canadian Celiac Association (celiac.ca) is dedicated to providing services and support to those with celiac disease and dermatitis herpetiformis through awareness, advocacy and educational programs.
- Celiac Disease Foundation (celiac.org) drives diagnosis

and treatment of celiac disease through advocacy, education and advancing research to improve the quality of life for all people affected by gluten-related disorders.

- Beyond Celiac (beyondceliac.org) has community outreach programs that aim to educate individuals, doctors and food service professionals while improving the quality of life for those diagnosed with celiac disease and other gluten-related disorders.
- Gluten Intolerance Group, also known as GIG (gluten.org), provides support to those with gluten-related disorders through innovative industry, service, social and awareness programs.

You will come out of this transition a new person—one who is in control of your health for the first time in a long time. Things are looking up!

—Jennifer Harris