

and cereals are easily found. Breakfast cereal can be pricey, but prices vary greatly among sources, so shop around. Some of the old stand bys like RiceChex are now gluten free, so even Target carries these kinds of GF items. Pastas come in a range of grains. Brown rice and quinoa (keen'-wah) pastas are terrific. Quinoa is a very nutritious grain with a unique flavor. Bread is a challenge all its own. GF bread rarely comes close to wheat based breads in texture or weight. Due to the short shelf life of GF breads, many are sold frozen. Those breads not frozen are sometimes vacuum sealed. These are lighter breads, yet can be dry or chalky. If you like, baking your own is an option as GF bread mixes, flours and recipes abound. We buy fresh GF bread and keep the open loaf in the refrigerator, the extras in the freezer. There is no way around it: bread will be a very personal adjustment.

●Snacks are available almost anywhere. Remember to read all labels to be sure your favorite snacks are gluten free, even foods that may not seem likely to have gluten. There are a few GF snack bars, many kinds of cookies, various rice chips and even GF pretzels, which are pretty great. For our family, corn tortilla chips, popcorn and the occasional potato chips are snacks of choice. Rice cakes come in a wide variety of flavors today and can be used for snacks or sandwiches. Snack adjustment is more mindful than anything else. Lara included some gluten-free snack ideas: GF Yogurt; GF pretzels with peanut butter or cheese; fresh, dried or canned fruit; popcorn; fresh veggies and GF dip; GF snack bars and homemade GF trail mix (GF cereal, raisins, nuts, and M&M chocolate candies). Always have gluten-free snacks available for children to take along to outside activities.

Additionally, there are many resources for gluten free foods and guidance available on-line today. Here are some to get started:

●Living Without magazine is a lifestyle guide for people with allergies and food sensitivities. It is a great source of new recipes and resources. www.livingwithout.com

●Another great source for tips on living GF are resources on the GFCF diet. The gluten-free and casein (milk derivative) free diet is an alternative protocol for the treatment for Autism. www.gfcfdiet.org

●The Gluten Free Mall is a vast GF online market. www.theglutenfreemall.com

The University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center
www.celiacdisease.net
773-702-7593

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Living Gluten Free

by Gina Musielski



In September, 2009, the UPS for DownS meeting topic was celiac disease. Lara Field, Pediatric Dietician with the University of Chicago Celiac Disease Center, discussed the gluten-free diet needed for those with celiac disease.

Lara reviewed that having celiac disease (CD) causes damage to the intestine, commonly in the duodenum, the first portion of the small intestine. This damage in turn reduces the body's ability to absorb nutrients, causing nutrient deficiencies in the body over time. Deficiencies in iron, folate, calcium and fat soluble vitamins are common. These deficiencies weaken overall health, reduce the immune system and can affect growth in children.

The good news is that the only 'medicine' needed to repair this damage is adopting a gluten-free diet! Avoiding gluten allows the bowel to heal, vitamin absorption to improve and body systems to rebound. The GF diet must be maintained for life. The diet is simple, yet most of us dread the mere thought of having to live a gluten-free lifestyle. My family has been living gluten-free (GF) for some eight years now, and it took some adjusting, but I can honestly say that it is not nearly as bad as it seems.

So what is a Gluten-Free diet? Quite simply: Avoidance of all food products containing wheat, rye, barley, and oats and their derivatives. Gluten is the general name for the storage protein (prolamins) found in these grains. Lara Field gave us detailed information about what constitutes a truly 'gluten-free' food. She included lists of gluten-free grains and food additives in her presentation. The link can be found at www.upsfordowns.org in a pdf file titled: "The Gluten Free Diet".

For a food to be GF the bottom line is: no ingredients that have 20 parts per million or more of gluten in them. To better explain how much that is, Lara used bread as an example. On average one typical slice of wheat bread is approximately 40 grams of weight. The protein in the bread makes up about 10-15% of the slice, or 4 grams. Half of the protein portion in wheat is gliadin, the part of the protein that causes intestinal reaction for celiacs. So, an average slice of bread has 2 grams, or 2000 mg, of gliadin. A toxic reaction is caused by only 100 mg or more of gliadin. So...it takes only 5% of the protein portion of one slice of bread to cause an intestinal reaction for someone with CD. Ouch.

Lara explained that a safe threshold for gluten exposure is between 10 - 100 mg, and that a daily intake of 30 mg of gliadin seems not to harm the intestinal mucosa. While she acknowledged that complete gluten avoidance is extremely difficult, since trace amounts of gluten are common even if the product is sold as naturally gluten-free, she impressed on us that one must consider all trace amounts of gluten when monitoring the diet.

The term 'gluten-free' is unregulated in the U.S. at this time. Products are randomly tested for gluten content. Canada has a regulation for the term, and European countries allow wheat starch, so travelers be aware. In the U.S., the Food Allergy and Labeling Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA) provides for clear labeling of the top 8 food allergens. Wheat is one of these 8, but this excludes barley and rye, so for those with CD, this guide is not definitive. Knowing what is GF and reading labels is the only way to be safe.

Living gluten-free means also being aware of possible cross contamination of foods. Ingestion of even trace amounts of gluten should be avoided. This means monitoring children's art projects and activities that use items containing gluten, such as play dough and pasta. It also means extra emphasis on hand washing for children, something most of us are already keen to do. Hand washing protocol after such activities ensures those with CD remain safe after other children use gluten containing products.

Lara cautioned us about another cross contamination concern: oats. Recent research has found that oats are well tolerated by most with CD when consumed in moderation, and do not contribute to abdominal symptoms, nor prevent intestinal healing. However, most commercially available oats are contaminated with wheat or barley, thus there has been confusion over whether oats are okay to eat or not. Only pure, uncontaminated oats in quantities of less than a cup per day can be safely consumed by people with CD. Lara advised that people with CD talk with their physician and registered dietician prior to starting oats.

Cross contamination can also occur in toasters, colanders, double dipping in condiment containers and even sponges used to clean up! It may seem a lot of vigilance is needed to be gluten-free, but, thinking of it as adding new healthy habits to those you have already adopted with your children eases our way to change. Can you remember when eating in restaurants full of cigarette smoke was the norm?

So where does the family with newly diagnosed celiac disease begin? Going gluten free, like a many things we've learned with our kids, does not mean you're alone. Remember your fellow UPS for DownS families with celiac when you need a little support. Having gone through this as a parent I find there is a kind of process to making the change to living GF.

- First learn what foods and additives are gluten-free. Review Lara's presentation notes at www.upsfordowns.org to learn what is safe to consume. These lists include grains which my family was unfamiliar with when we first began the diet, but are common grains in many other cultures. Exploring new recipes can be fun.

- Buy or borrow some gluten-free cookbooks to learn about GF cooking and baking. The UPS for DownS Resource Library has several to lend. Some of my favorite books are Special Diets for Special Kids by Lisa Lewis, Ph.D., The Allergy Self-Help Cookbook by Marjorie Hurt Jones, R.N. and Incredible Edible Gluten-Free Food for Kids by Sheri L. Sanderson.

- Decide whether the whole family is going to go GF or whether you will keep a mixed menu. There are challenges to each method. If only one family member goes GF, it will entail cooking different meals for family members, ensuring the child with celiac is not eating any offending foods in the house, and avoiding cross contamination. Consider also the additional challenge for the child trying to change as other family members continue to eat the foods they cannot. On the flip side, in order for the whole family to adopt the GF diet, everyone has to be willing to change (or be too young to have a choice). In our case, we all went GF as our children were young at the time, and we felt it would be easier that way. In doing this, my husband and I inadvertently discovered we had undiagnosed celiac disease ourselves.

- Allow plenty of time to shop; reading every label is necessary. You may be surprised to discover how many foods include wheat products. Assume nothing. Watch for the not-so-obvious foods like soups, gravies and sauces; even canned frosting. The name of the product does not ensure GF: even some potato chips and french fries contain wheat!

- Look through your family recipes to make adjustments with GF ingredients. There is a GF variation possible for almost every recipe; it just takes a little research. Your family will be happier keeping their old family favorites in play.

- Check out a variety of grocery stores. In the Chicago area, the major grocery chains, such as Jewel and Dominick's usually have aisles designated for special dietary needs. The range of GF products varies among individual stores. In Schaumburg, the Jewel on Roselle and Wise near the UPS for DownS office has a nice selection of GF items. Some grocery chains such as Trader Joe's and Whole Foods provide lists of the GF foods they carry. Large warehouse chains like Meijier and Costco even carry gluten-free items. Prices vary and GF foods are generally more expensive than products containing wheat.

- Look for gluten free markets, bakeries and online suppliers. A safe place to begin shopping is a gluten free market. The shop managers are often a wealth of information on GF products. Baked goods are hard to live without, but Deerfield's Bakery has a designated gluten free location in Schaumburg. While they are not currently doing GF birthday cakes, their baguettes are simply delicious! On-line you will find a number of GF suppliers. Some areas have GF cooperatives that families can join to buy in bulk.

- Start the diet with the basic staple foods in your life. Finding GF substitutes for the can't-live-without foods will make the switch easier. Bread, pasta, cereal, and snacks are the things to locate first. Pizza is also a necessity, as it seems every other party serves pizza. To maintain your child's social life, you will need to find a GF version. Gluten-free pastas