**TEN THINGS TO DO WHEN YOUR CHILD IS DIAGNOSED WITH CELIAC DISEASE**

By Christine Power Thielman

**1. Cry**. Shed a little tear for your childhood brownie recipe, for your family’s favorite banana chocolate chip muffins, for Friday night pizza from your local joint. It’s hard. It is. Then dry your eyes and be the adult in this scenario.

**2. Decide whether to be a gluten-free family or mix it up in the kitchen.** Two out of five in our family have celiac, so it seemed unfair (and expensive) to limit everyone’s diet. That doesn’t mean I bake cookies that everyone can’t eat, but it does mean that we have two toasters, two kinds of waffles in the freezer, and both gluten-free (GF) and regular pasta in the cabinet.

**3. Figure out the logistics.** Learn what is essential and what is hype, rumor, or misinformation about gluten-free living. For example, you must get a new toaster. Not to scare you, but as my son’s formerly laid back GI doctor told me after his diagnosis, “It takes 1/100th of a piece of regular bread to cause intestinal damage to a celiac.”

If your child likes pasta, you need a new colander, and no matter what your child eats, you need a GF cutting board. Gluten from pasta will not wash off, even in the dishwasher, and cutting boards are porous. Make sure all these items are bright colors and/or prominently labeled.

On the other hand, you can use the same pots, pans and glassware for everyone. A great suggestion I got from a book on celiac was to use the same pan, but in the proper order. If you’re making grilled cheese for your celiac child and your non-celiac child, you can use the same frying pan. Just do the gluten-free sandwich first.

Do yourself a favor and keep what we call the gluteny bread next to the gluteny toaster. This will help to prevent goofs.

**4. Find substitutes for the things your child loves most**. For my eight-year-old, the top priority was GF pasta he could live with. Try, try again until you find the one that works. If, like my son, your child picks the fancy schmancy, organic, imported from Italy pasta over all others, grit your teeth and buy it at Whole Foods. You’ll cut back somewhere else.

Try out a GF bakery to replace the weekly donut run with Dad. When your children mourn the loss of ice cream cones, remind them that they can still have ice cream sundaes. Rejoice in the loss of guilt over fast food drive through runs – you can’t go there anymore, and you will all feel better for it.

**5. Figure out what to buy and what to make from scratch or a mix.** I use my bread machine to make GF bread from a mix, and freeze individual slices. It tastes much better than the ready made breads we’ve tried.

On my first Google search for GF treats I found a killer flourless chocolate cookie recipe. I make a batch every two weeks and freeze them in individual snack bags. One goes into each lunch box, and Oreos are a distant memory.

If you love to cook, think of this as exciting new terrain. You’ll have new cookbooks to read in bed, GF websites to peruse, and online forums you can join for recipe ideas.

If you don’t cook, survey your gluten-free friends for their favorite products. If your child’s hospital offers events for celiac kids, try all the free samples that vendors bring in. It’s no fun to shell out big bucks for a box of untried GF crackers and watch them get stale because nobody likes them.

**6. Plan for birthday parties and special events.** You must always, always have food with you. If kids routinely get cookies after church, have some GF ones in your bag. To birthday parties, bring a beautifully decorated GF cupcake. My kids don’t complain about missing the birthday cake, but other kids sometimes ask for a cupcake!

**7. Find the best GF restaurant options.** Many restaurants now take food intolerances very seriously. A local chain with a GF kids’ menu didn’t want to give my daughter an ice cream cup, even though I knew it was safe, because they hadn’t made it themselves. Their caution was very comforting.

When our favorite pizza place started offering GF pizza, I asked how they kept it separate from the other pizza dough and they were happy to tell me. Be wary of cross contamination, but your family can still eat out. I’m convinced there will be soon be entirely gluten-free restaurants.

**8. Reach out.** Within twelve hours of my son’s diagnosis, I had eight detailed emails from members of our town’s parenting listserv. These generous women not only told me what brands their children liked best, but where exactly in the grocery store to find them. Another friend had tried all the GF baking and pancake mixes. She told me which one tasted best and the cheapest source for buying it in bulk.

**9. Get your other children tested**. Celiac is a genetic condition. My asymptomatic 4 year old turned out to have a small intestine that was just as damaged as her big brother’s.

It’s a good idea for parents and grandparents to be tested as well, since some people go through life thinking they have “bad stomachs” when they really suffer from celiac disease. Eliminating gluten can be transformative.

**10. Look on the bright side.** True, celiac takes some spontaneity out of your life. But because you must plan ahead, you will probably all eat more healthfully.

I’m grateful that my kids were diagnosed at ages 8 and 4 rather than much later. I appreciate the ease of looking up “safe” foods on the Internet (imagine figuring this out 20 years ago!) and the many products that are labeled gluten-free.

Most of all, I’m thankful that this disease can be treated with dietary restrictions alone. When you think of the difficult treatments that children battling cancer or diabetes go through, giving up gluten seems like a small price to pay for health.