

# Celiac Disease in Children: A Practical Diagnosis and Management Guide

Symptoms, testing (while eating gluten), and the day-to-day gluten-free plan.

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## Quick note:

This guide is for general education. It cannot diagnose your child. If you are worried, trust your instincts and seek medical care.

## What celiac disease is

Celiac disease is an immune reaction to gluten (in wheat, barley, and rye) that damages the small intestine. It can cause gut symptoms, growth problems, anemia, and fatigue. Some children have subtle or no gut symptoms.

- It is not a food preference and not the same as non-celiac gluten sensitivity.
- The treatment is a strict lifelong gluten-free diet after diagnosis.

## Common symptoms in children

- Chronic belly pain, bloating, diarrhea or constipation.
- Poor growth, weight loss, or delayed puberty.
- Iron deficiency anemia, fatigue, irritability.
- Mouth ulcers, nausea, vomiting (selected), dental enamel defects.
- Skin rash (dermatitis herpetiformis - less common in kids).

## How testing works (important)

Testing is only accurate if your child is eating gluten regularly. Do not start a gluten-free diet before testing unless your clinician tells you to.

- Initial blood test often includes tissue transglutaminase IgA (tTG-IgA) plus total IgA.
- If IgA is low, alternative tests are used (your clinician will guide).
- In selected children, diagnosis may be possible without biopsy using strict criteria (specialist-led).

## After diagnosis: the practical plan

- Work with a dietitian experienced in pediatric celiac disease.
- Learn label reading and cross-contamination prevention (toasters, cutting boards, shared spreads).
- Screen and treat nutritional deficiencies (iron, vitamin D, others as guided).
- Follow-up blood tests to confirm healing and diet adherence.
- Inform school/daycare and family; create safe routines.

## Who should be screened even without symptoms

- First-degree relatives (parent, sibling, child) of a person with celiac disease.
- Type 1 diabetes.
- Autoimmune thyroid disease.
- Down syndrome, Turner syndrome, selective IgA deficiency.

## Key sources (for clinicians and curious parents)

These are major guideline-style references used to shape recommendations. Your clinician may follow local protocols.

- ESPGHAN guideline: Diagnosis of coeliac disease in children and adolescents (includes no-biopsy pathway under strict criteria).
- NASPGHAN celiac disease clinical resources for families.

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