

The diagnosis

A new diagnosis of celiac disease can be overwhelming. But you can do this! Try these eight steps to start you down the right path.

YOU GOT THIS

BY JUSTINE DOWD, PHD
AND SELENA DEVRIES, RD

We've been there – struggling with digestive pain, bloating, gas, diarrhea, headaches, and skin issues for years. Finally, a reason: celiac disease. This diagnosis may have felt bitter-sweet. Sweet in that you finally have a reason for all of your pain and discomfort and there is something that you can do to feel better: the gluten-free (GF) diet! Bitter in that you may have to say goodbye to eating foods that you enjoy and the ease of eating anything when out.

Many people feel lost, frustrated and alone after this diagnosis. You are not alone in these feelings – thousands of people are diagnosed with celiac disease annually. However, up to 47% of people with celiac disease still report gastrointestinal distress even while following a strict GF diet. Here are eight steps to consider if you are newly diagnosed or struggling with celiac disease:



1. Take time to grieve. For some, a celiac diagnosis is welcomed as a reason for ongoing health issues. For others, it can feel devastating. Take time to grieve this diagnosis and honour your feelings. Mental health care professionals can play a key role in helping you to effectively cope with your diagnosis.

2. Practice self-compassion. Research shows that among adults with celiac disease, those who practice self-compassion report better quality of life and stricter adherence to a GF diet.

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Here’s how to start practicing self-compassion:

■ *Pay attention to your self-talk.*

Do you speak to yourself as you would a close friend? If you notice negative self-talk, start to replace negative thoughts with positive ones. Self-kindness is an effective strategy when coping with adversity.

■ *Remind yourself that you are not alone.* Part of being human is that we go through difficult times. Reminding yourself that you are not alone in your struggles can reduce the intensity of the distress you feel.

■ *Embrace mindfulness.* Mindfulness involves relating to our experiences with non-judgment and acceptance. Focusing on your breathing is an effective way to bring your attention to the present moment and reduce rumination.

3. Connect with others. One of the top predictors of well-being with celiac disease is membership in a support group. Support groups, like the Canadian Celiac Association, are important because they provide current evidence-based information on disease management and social support.

4. Plan for success. Creating a weekly meal plan is a great way to set yourself up for success on a GF diet. Find recipes you are

excited to try and create a shopping list so you can enjoy home cooked meals.

5. Communicate your needs. Talk to your family and friends about your diagnosis so they understand why you have to be careful about what you eat. When your family and friends are well-educated on meal preparation for celiac disease, it can help you feel more at ease and better able to enjoy social gatherings.

6. Learn the label lingo. Reading labels can cause a lot of stress and overwhelm, especially when newly diagnosed. In Canada, we are fortunate to have strict labelling laws. All ingredients that come from, or are derived from, gluten will always be identified on labels as: barley, rye, wheat, (regular) oats and triticale.

7. Connect with a registered dietitian with expertise in celiac disease. A dietitian can be your best friend when it comes to celiac disease management. From clearing confusion with label reading, to identifying nutrient deficiencies, to helping uncover lingering symptoms on a GF diet, a celiac dietitian can help you feel better, faster.

8. Focus on fiber. Fiber is often forgotten about on the GF diet but

it plays an integral role in healing the body after a celiac diagnosis. Bacteria in the large intestine rely on sufficient amounts of fiber for their survival. When bacteria have access to ferment a wide variety of fibers, they create beneficial compounds for us including anti-inflammatory components that help tame inflammation and strengthen the gut lining. Fiber can be found in fruits, vegetables, GF whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans and legumes. Aim to consume 25g (women + children) upwards to 38g (men + male teenagers) of fibre daily. Tips to increase fibre:

- Include fresh fruit at breakfast
- Aim for two cups of vegetables at both lunch and dinner
- Include nuts and seeds, daily. ♦

Dr. Justine Dowd, PhD, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Calgary, is a health behaviour change specialist, wholistic health coach, diagnosed celiac and academic expert in self-compassion, health behaviour change, and gut health. w: <https://www.justinedowd.ca/> e: jdowd@ucalgary.ca

Selena Devries, RD, is a registered dietitian, specializing in celiac disease (after her own diagnosis), and a board member of the Canadian Celiac Association. w: www.healthbean.ca e: selenadevries@gmail.com