

DINING OUT WITH CELIAC:

PREPARED BY THE CALGARY CELIAC EDUCATION COMMITTEE

When It's More Than Just a Dinner:

Dining out is the most difficult part of living with celiac disease. Once you have been diagnosed with this chronic illness, eating out is forever changed. It will never be the same as it once was. This is an, unfortunate, stark reality check for those living with celiac. It sounds harsh, but it is true. There is no spontaneity with eating out anymore.

But, this doesn't mean that you can't eat out. You just need to change your expectations and learn a new way to dine out. It can still be an enjoyable experience but it will take effort to ensure it's as safe as it can be.



The question to ask yourself is this “Are you going to let this bring you down or are you going to rise to the challenge?”

While the opportunity to eat out is important for those with Celiac Disease, it is beyond the scope of the Calgary Chapter of the CCA to maintain a reliable list of restaurants, hotels, and food providers that are “safe” for people with Celiac Disease to use. There are multiple challenges with such a list: food markets always changing, varied levels of employee awareness (including high staff turnover), updated lists, soliciting information/advertising, and consequences of any cross-contamination. There are many blogs, apps and search engines that will lead you towards safe eating establishments, and our recommendation is to use more than one source of information when researching a restaurant (i.e. family, friends, word of mouth, blogs, apps, search engines, reviews, advertisements, and speaking to restaurant staff/managers directly). Many chapter members have reported the following sources as helpful to them: GFYYC, Yelp, and Find Me Gluten Free.

The more information and reviews acquired the better off you will be. You can find a list of 100% gluten free restaurants in Calgary on our webpage.

LOCAL GF BUSINESS – CALGARY CELIAC

People with Celiac Disease that do not have noticeable symptoms of gluten ingestion; always have intestinal damage when gluten is ingested, even if it is a very small amount of gluten. As per Health Canada, “the majority of people with Celiac disease will not be negatively affected if they limit their gluten intake to less than 10 mg per day”¹. If a person sliced an average piece of regular bread (4.8 grams of gluten) into 500 pieces, 1 of these 500 pieces would equal approximately 10mg of gluten. Even though a restaurant states their food is gluten free, it does not mean that there will be no cross-contamination with gluten through the preparation or cooking process.

Dining out is certainly more challenging with celiac disease due to the restrictions of following a gluten-free diet, but it is still possible to have a safe and enjoyable restaurant experience with some simple precautions.

Tips for Dining Out - Before you go:

- Avoid buffets as other patrons may use utensils multiple times, or foods may spill into other containers
- Call the restaurant ahead of time during non-peak hours, let them know you have celiac disease and require a gluten-free meal
- Ask if they have a gluten-free menu, what is done to prevent cross-contamination, and what they recommend for diners who require a gluten-free meal
- Browse online menu at the restaurant
- Dine during off-peak hours so staff are better able to focus on your needs
- Explain your dietary needs to staff - clarify that you have celiac disease (medically diagnosed) versus following a gluten-free diet as a lifestyle choice
- Emphasize that even small amounts of gluten can make you very sick

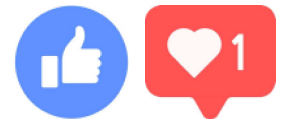
To help mitigate risks while ordering when eating out, we recommend asking questions such as:

- Do you have a gluten free menu? Do you know what Celiac Disease is?
- What precautions does your kitchen take when preparing gluten free products (e.g. separate prep area for GF foods, toasters, clean grills, dedicated GF deep fryers, separate strainers, cutting boards, mixing bowls, spoons, knives, changing gloves, separate ingredient containers (pizza sauce, butter), etc).
- Are the sauces home-made or packaged? (there is potential for gluten in each ingredient, or in hidden sources, e.g. broth, seasonings, Worcestershire sauce, soy sauce, teriyaki sauce, horseradish, malt vinegars, etc.)
- Common foods with hidden gluten can include french fries, hashbrowns, cereals, egg mixtures (e.g. for omelettes), corn tortillas (often still have wheat in them)
- Do you make baked products on site with flour every day? (the flour in the air will take 24 hours to settle)

There is a growing concern from the celiac community that restaurants call foods gluten free when they are not (e.g. they still have use of shared fryers/toasters/cutting boards, cross contamination, etc). While we have no control over what a specific business will and will not do, we are advocating for businesses to be properly certified and we continue to encourage consumers to be asking appropriate questions.

For the majority of people, eating out is relaxing, but for those with celiac disease it can be anxious, frustrating and even illness-inducing. Being diagnosed as celiac requires a complete review of the order, to eliminate foods containing gluten, and also a new vigilance when eating outside the home.

Sharing food with family and friends is really important for our well-being. If you had a positive dining experience, were understood by your server, noticed clear protocols in place, or feel that you were well taken care of (*and of course, did not get sick*), let the restaurant know. Leave a review online and mention specifics of how they helped you eat safely. Call them or message them on social media and thank them. Tip them too. The more we can spread the word about places that ARE doing a good job, the better and safer dining out will be.



References

1. Health Canada, Health Canada's Position on Gluten Free Claims, June 2012 <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-safety/food-allergies-intolerances/celiac-disease/health-canada-position-gluten-free-claims.html#a2>

