

## Growing with Celiac Disease

Increased recognition and treatment create opportunities for dietitians

By Loretta Jay, MA  
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Today life is simpler for those with celiac disease; gluten-free food is easier to find and label-reading doesn't require a PhD in chemistry and food manufacturing. But that doesn't mean that the job of the dietitian is done. On the contrary, skilled dietitians specially trained in celiac disease and the gluten-free diet are needed now more than ever.

The prevalence of celiac disease has increased four-fold since the 1950s, and now affects approximately one of every 100 to 133 Americans. As the diagnosis rate increases, so does the need for support for those with the disease. The only treatment for celiac is a strict, life-long gluten-free diet. Properly following the restrictive diet and understanding the ins and outs of food handling can be tricky. Consequently, the recommended treatment plan for every diagnosed person with celiac is to consult with a dietitian knowledgeable in the disease and a gluten-free diet.

Where are these dietitians? Although the numbers of skilled dietitians, proficient in the diet is growing, the supply is not keeping-up with the demand. As a result the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness (NFCA) has developed two different training programs for dietitians that address these increased educational needs. These programs are accredited by the Commission on Dietetic Registration, the credentialing agency for the American Dietetic Association (ADA): Gluten-free Resource Education and Awareness Training (GREAT) Dietitians – Foodservice© and GREAT Dietitians – Healthcare and Clinical Settings©.

The two continuing education (CE) courses are among those available at The Celiac Learning Center ([www.CeliacLearning.com](http://www.CeliacLearning.com)) Other accredited courses are available for nurses, social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, nurse practitioners and kitchens.

### Opportunities

The role of the clinical dietitian goes far beyond providing a list of gluten-free foods and the kitchen guidelines to avoid cross-contamination. Patients need guidance and reassurance. When first diagnosed with celiac disease many feel overwhelmed. They may question what they will eat for dinner, and also at Aunt Ira's big family get-together next weekend. They may need support with extended family, as others may dismiss the importance of adherence to the diet.

Assistance and strategies when traveling outside the home also fall under the purview of the dietitian-client relationship. Allowing the newly diagnosed time to grieve the loss of bread and other gluten-containing foods helps them accept the lifestyle change. Learning the particulars takes time, and more importantly, education.



**Chebe Breadsticks at the National Restaurant Association's Gluten-free Pavilion.**  
*(All Photos courtesy of the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness)*

To be successful the celiac must learn about alternative grains and techniques for substitution. She needs to recognize risk areas for cross-contamination, how to advocate for herself and to plan ahead to be ready for the unexpected. Dietitians who are prepared for the influx of newly diagnosed patients will be ready to be a vital player in the field.

A diagnosis of celiac disease doesn't need to mean a life of home-cooked meals. The food service industry has recently embraced gluten-free food preparation. In addition to heading up an educational panel about celiac disease and the gluten-free diet at the 2010 National Restaurant Association Show in May, NFCA hosted the first-ever Gluten-free Showcase Pavilion at the event. The Pavilion demonstrated that gluten-free has become mainstream.

Participants showcased the full range of gluten-free menu items including gluten-free flour and pizza dough, delicious prepared foods and testing kits that verify that foods are gluten-free. Even packaging and presentation were included, with many major food manufacturers and food industry representatives in attendance. Cruise lines, hotel and restaurant chains, hospitals and food manufacturers were checking out the products and networking with one another. It was an amazing testimonial to the power of the growing gluten-free marketplace, which is expected to reach 2.6 billion by 2012.





**Gluten-free Showcase Pavilion Chef Demo area – home**

**to over 20 gluten-free demonstrations from chefs across the nation.**

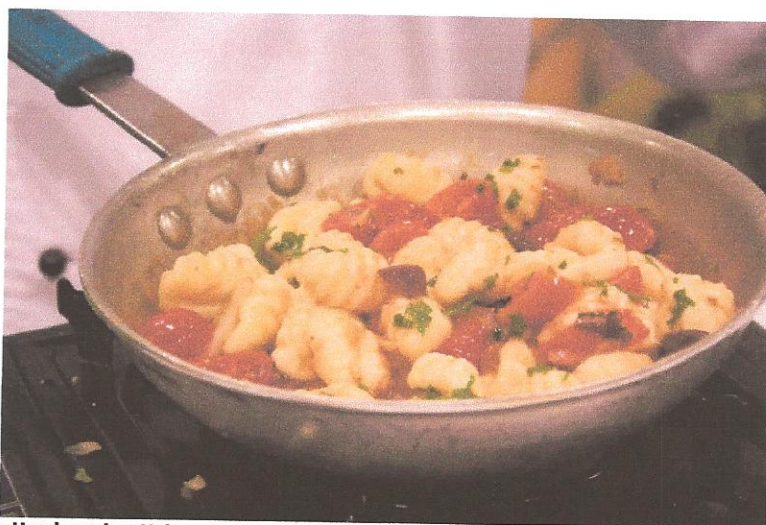
Many of the roles within the food industry that require gluten-free proficiency are led by Registered Dietitians. Melissa Marek, RD, LD who works at Nutritionist Pro, a nutrient analysis and food labeling program with Axya Systems, has experienced this. She says that "it's important for restaurants to be proactive and provide not only allergen information, but more specifically gluten-free menu items for those who are on a restricted diet."

Marek says the GREAT training gave her the knowledge to help her restaurant clients with gluten identification, which is good because "following a gluten-free diet is now becoming more and more common."

### **Diagnosis**

Of the three million people in the United States with celiac disease, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) estimates that only 150,000 are diagnosed. There is a recent appreciation that the disease is more common than previously understood. The myriad of symptoms, coupled with a lack of knowledge of modern diagnostic algorithms, hinders accurate diagnosis. The NIH recommends that dietitians and other healthcare providers receive training about celiac disease to address this shortfall.

Many providers are familiar with gastrointestinal ailments as symptoms of celiac. Anorexia is considered too. Less understood are weight gain, migraines, infertility and developmental delays in children – and many other symptoms. Recognition of the many manifestations is the first step to identify people with the autoimmune disease.



**Chef James Harris makes Kalamata Olive, Basil and Tomato Gnocchi using Conte's Gluten-free Gnocchi.**

Dietitians who are a part of the multi-disciplinary team can play an integral role in this process. This collaboration between different therapeutic areas creates a formidable team, able to recognize and treat people with celiac. The need for such teams is becoming more apparent in private practice, medical centers, nursing homes and rehabilitation facilities, as well as many other healthcare environments.

Both of the GREAT Dietitians© courses, Foodservice and Healthcare, empower dietitians with tools to meet the needs of the celiac population. Because of the growing celiac population and the patients' need for knowledgeable guides, the specialized training makes the dietitian more marketable. Those who meet their state's minimum requirements, and who are knowledgeable in expanding niche markets like celiac, have more favorable job opportunities.

The Celiac Learning Center's courses are all tailored to the needs of the specific disciplines. They provide the learner with needed information to identify the undiagnosed and also to support individuals who are already following the gluten-free diet. Learners who complete the training receive a free one year listing in the Gluten-free Yellow Pages ([www.glutenfreeyellowpages.com](http://www.glutenfreeyellowpages.com)) which is launching later this fall.

This site offers a searchable database of knowledgeable dietitians and other healthcare providers, gluten-free food products and dining establishments. Gluten-free medications will soon be listed too. As another tool to support everyday life for those on a gluten-free diet, consumers and professionals will be able to go to the Gluten-free Yellow Pages to find needed resources.

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