



Ask the Teen...

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The college search.

I know. Believe me, I know exactly how terrifying those three words are, and for a whole plethora of reasons - the essay, the interviews, the bags and bags of college mail featuring kids with creepy grins, the hefty tuition bill... The list goes on.

Unfortunately, the only thing I can help with is the food.

We're fortunate to live in a time where food intolerances are increasingly understood and cooperated with, both by peers-to-be and by the dining halls. Almost every school has accommodations for students with celiac disease, and if you ask, they'll tell you that. However, "accommodations" can refer to anything from one measly freezer to an entire dining hall. The trick is to figure out what each school has. Here are some tips:

1. Tour the school. This is a good idea anyway, but it's also a useful tool when scouting for gluten-free options. A lot of tours will take you right through the dining hall, in which case you can see for yourself if they have clearly labeled dishes and allergen-friendly counters or if everything is in one big hodgepodge. If your tour doesn't take you through a dining hall, stay afterwards and ask to see it. If you explain why, most schools will agree without a murmur.

2. Do the overnights. Some schools only do overnights after acceptances; others do them before. Some don't do them at all. If it's an option, though, inform them that you have celiac disease before attending, and then pay close attention! If you can barely stand the food they provide for one night, 4 years is going to be a challenge.

3. Ask around! Whether in person or on online forums, kids know food (believe me), so word of mouth is actually a very reliable source in this case. If you can find a kid with celiac disease at the school you're looking at, you've found a gold mine. If not, a lot of kids will still be able to tell you how good the allergen policies are.

4. Do some research online. I think I say that in every single article, but it's always true. Do some scouting

online for gluten-free-friendly schools, and you won't be disappointed!

So, what if you fall in love with a school with terrible accommodations? Never fear - all is not lost! There are other ways to eat.

Take breakfast, for example. For those of us with celiac disease, breakfast is a bummer of a meal: cereal, muffins, doughnuts, toast, bagels, pancakes, oddly shaped French pastries... All delicious-looking, super high-calorie, and profoundly not gluten-free. (I think breakfast alone could be the source of the misconception that GF diets help you lose weight.) In a dining hall, especially one with poor accommodations, your options are ... eggs. Maybe some fruit or bacon if it's a nice dining hall, but otherwise, eggs it is... Unless you consider that not all your food needs to come from the dining hall. Take the eggs, if you want them, but supplement with food of your own. Keep some food in your room: it's nice to have gluten-free cereal, a cereal bowl, and a spoon (and potentially milk, if you have a mini fridge), or instant oatmeal, or a big tub of yogurt. If you have late classes in the morning and there are GF breakfast places nearby, go to those, by all means! If you have friends living off-campus, ask to use their kitchen.

Essentially, don't forget that there are places to eat other than the dining hall. If you're resourceful, you can be at a college with few or no accommodations and still put on the "Freshman Fifteen."

So good luck with your search and your applications, and, as always, bon appétit!

If you are a teenager and have an issue, problem or question you want advice on send an e-mail to: celiacsupportgroup@childrens.harvard.edu And put "Ask the teen" in the subject heading.