



Ask the Teen...

TESS ROSS-CALLAHAN (AGE 15)

Question:

I was diagnosed with celiac when I was barely 1-year old. Now I'm almost 12 and used to celiac. But last week I went to a birthday party. I brought my own slice of cake as usual, but the cake looked really good and I got a little sad. So this boy tried to make me feel better by plopping a big chunk of his (WHEAT!!) cake onto my plate, which contaminated my only piece of cake. I had no clue what to say and am afraid this situation might come up again. What can I do?

From, Ariana, age 11

Dear Ariana,

Wow, so you're an old hand at this, huh? I am too, but I still get sad when I see a really yummy-looking cake. I'll try and talk myself out of being good - surely the frosting is gluten free, and if it never touched the cake, why would it matter if I just took a lick? Now, of course that's unreasonable, and we both know it. But it is okay to be sad now and then when you look at something that has gluten in it. It happens to all of us, even though we have really great substitutes for baked goods like that.

That boy who was trying to help you feel less sad is a tricky one to respond to. I would've had no idea what to say either! Since he wasn't being mean, it's hard to really get angry at him. But it is SO annoying to have somebody who doesn't know what they're doing get in your way like that. And even though he was trying to help, he did ruin your only piece of cake.

I probably would ask why he did that. If the cake is ruined, look around for other things to eat, like fruit or drinks. Nothing is more depressing than sitting with an empty plate while everyone else eats, even if what you have to eat isn't as good as what they have. If you have your own piece of cake and are looking sad, maybe ask people not to touch it. You can bring as much as you want, just in case, but as long as everyone knows that you can't eat gluten, hopefully they will know better than to bother you.

Also, if you like, you can bring a different kind of treat with you in addition to your cake. Something you really like, like your favorite kind of snack or a candy bar. This way, even if nothing happens to your cake but the gluten cake looks good, you have another option. They may be able to eat the delicious-looking gluten cake, but you have a piece of cake AND something else. Always make sure an adult at the party knows you have celiac disease and then go have fun! Cake may be one of the best things about birthdays, but there are other things that are fun, too.

If this does happen again, don't eat the cake. Look for something else yummy and try not to show the boy how annoying it is that he just ruined dessert for you. When you get home, if you're still feeling sad about it, have a grown-up help you make your own cake. Eat some for no good reason - just because you can.

Bon appetit!

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.