
Now That You're Accepted, What's Gluten Free?

HANNAH SWARTZ

To all of you who recently got accepted to college or have a child who did, congratulations! I'm sure this is an exciting yet challenging time for you all as you begin to think about the next chapter of your life.

Many of the factors in handling celiac disease at college will really depend on your personality and the environment in which you will be living. Once you find out where you'll be living, it's good to look into where the nearest dining hall is, if you have your own kitchen or if there's a communal one on your hall, and whether you will have a refrigerator in your room. Most schools either provide or allow for mini-fridges in dorm rooms. I personally found it worthwhile to invest in one so that I always had a stock of food I knew I could eat.

At most colleges, there is a mix of all-you-can-eat dining halls and cafés on campus, and there is usually a meal plan to match the options. Dining halls are sometimes the most challenging, because the food is mass-produced, and it can be hard to find out what's in the food, where it was made, and whether it is safe for you. The dining halls are often sorted into sections though, and it is easy to rule out a few stations that offer mostly foods with gluten, such as a pasta bar.

Before you leave for college, go on your school's website and see if they have a page about gluten-free eating or dietary restrictions. Get in touch with the head of dining via email or phone and ask how they generally deal with gluten-free diets. The information they give you and their knowledge will be very telling of what the environment is like for someone with celiac disease. They might offer to meet with you once you get on campus, or you can ask to meet, as this will be very beneficial! They will be able to tell you what their labeling system is. Most schools will list the presence of the top eight allergens, which unfortunately exclude gluten. However, some will also write, "gluten free." It is important to know that many dining halls do not

list ingredients for their dishes, which can make things a little trickier. You should ask for a list of places where it is safe for you to eat so that you always know your options. Additionally, many schools have a registered dietitian who will guide you in making safe and healthy decisions.

It can be hard to adjust to living on campus, especially if your college doesn't have a set system in place for those with celiac disease. However, with time, you'll quickly learn which cafés have a salad line where the croutons are kept separate, which breakfast station makes omelettes on a different griddle than the pancakes, and so on. I'm sure you are excited to go to college, and preparing for your experience will make things that much easier once you arrive!



Pictures courtesy of Cornell University Dining