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The gluten-free diet: How to provide effective education and resources

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A strict gluten-free diet (GFD) for life is the only treatment for celiac disease (CD). This article reviews (1) the impact of the GFD on the quality of life of individuals with CD and their families; (2) the causes of poorly controlled CD; (3) the access to and source and quality of information provided by health professionals and other groups; (4) management strategies, including nutritional assessment and education guidelines; (5) a variety of resources available to individuals and health professionals; (6) innovative educational initiatives and partnerships; and (7) specific recommendations to address the increasing numbers of people with CD and the growing need for gluten-free (GF) foods and further education about CD and the GFD. Successful management of CD requires a team approach, including the person with CD and his or her family, physician, dietitian, and celiac support group; an individualized approach; understanding of quality of life issues; use of evidence-based, current information and resources; and regular follow-up to monitor compliance, nutritional status, and additional information and support. The physician must clearly communicate, with a positive attitude, an overview of CD and

strongly emphasize the importance of a GFD for life. It is essential that the physician initiate an immediate referral to a dietitian with expertise in CD for nutritional assessment, diet education, meal planning, and assistance with the adaptation to the challenging new gluten-free lifestyle. Good dietary compliance will reduce the risk of further complications and associated health care costs and improve quality of life in patients with CD.



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Abbreviations used in this paper

CD, celiac disease; GF, gluten free; GFD, gluten-free diet; IOM, Institute of Medicine

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