

NAVIGATING CELIAC DISEASE IN COLLEGE: RESULTS FROM A NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY ON DINING, HOUSING, AND SUPPORT SERVICES

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Introduction:

College presents unique challenges for students with celiac disease, a chronic autoimmune disorder requiring strict lifelong adherence to a gluten-free diet. Despite increased awareness of food allergies and dietary restrictions, limited data exist how students with celiac disease navigate campus life.

Methods:

The Celiac Disease Foundation conducted a national survey between March 14 and April 2, 2025. The 35-question survey explored student experiences with dining accommodations, housing, support services, social experiences, and mental health. Responses were solicited via the Foundation's email and social media platforms.

College students
with celiac disease
face **persistent barriers**
to safe, inclusive participation
in campus life.



Results:

A total of 324 students attending colleges or universities in the United States completed the survey. Survey respondents represented diverse academic settings, with 54% attending public universities, 41% private institutions, and 5% community colleges. A majority (58%) lived in on-campus housing, and 55% participated in a college meal plan. However, campus dining posed significant challenges.

Dining Safety and Confidence:

53% reported gluten exposure in dining halls.

Only 7% felt "very confident" food was gluten-free, and **60%** either "not very confident" or "not confident at all."

Dining Hall Use and Satisfaction:

Nearly half of students rarely or never used the dining hall, citing lack of variety, poor quality, and inconvenience.

>60% expressed dissatisfaction with the variety of gluten-free options available.

Mental Health and Food Access:

63% experienced frequent stress or anxiety about managing celiac disease on campus.

90% reported skipping meals due to no safe gluten-free options.

53% avoided social events due to food safety.

Disability Accommodations and Support:

Only 32% of students had registered with their school's disability services for celiac-related accommodations. Among them,

20% found the office "very helpful" in securing safe housing or meal accommodations.

Perceived Campus Support:

Only 4.4% felt their campus community clearly understood or were very supportive students with celiac disease.

Conclusion:

The high rates of gluten exposure, meal-skipping, and associated stress underscore the need for policy-driven solutions to ensure equal access to food, health, and education for this vulnerable population. Institutions of higher education must improve gluten-free safety protocols, housing flexibility, and clear disability accommodations to support the well-being of students with celiac disease.