

Gluten-Free Family Activities

Source: Kristin Kirkpatrick, MS, RD, LD | April 2014 | 7 min read

As a dietitian, I see many patients walk through my doors with the desire to adopt a gluten-free lifestyle. While individual counseling is effective, the true key to success in making a gluten-free transition must go beyond the patient and touch the entire household. Most of my patients tell me that it takes about a month to make lasting changes within the walls of their home. Here is an effective (and fun) 4-week plan that you can pass on to your patients!

Week 1: Start with a family party

The best way to kick off the family initiative is to have a dinner party! Let extended family members know about your gluten-free plan ahead of time and involve them in the preparation and cooking process the day of. Focus the meal discussion on all the great food options that everyone is enjoying at the dinner party as well as the reasons why the family is going gluten-free. The message at your party should be positive and empowering and should focus on the positive impact that going gluten-free will have on all family members. Including extended family members in this process helps to communicate to everyone the seriousness of this decision and may help other family members support your gluten-free lifestyle at future family events.

Weeks 2-4: Take gluten-free field trips

Week 2

Kids love going on field trips and going on gluten-free trips makes the transition to the new diet even more fun. Week one can be a trip to the grocery store where all members of the family can learn about reading labels and understanding which foods are classified as gluten-free. This also provides an opportunity to look beyond grains and discuss the importance of getting plenty of fruits and vegetables, fiber, lean protein and healthy fats in the diet. The family may even choose to include their dietitian on this first trip. Before the trip ends, allow every member to pick out a gluten-free food to bring home.

Week 3

This week includes a visit to your favorite home goods store. Why? Because going gluten-free for the whole family means that the littlest members may be bringing their own food to school, parties and field trips. Kids in the family may start to view this diet change not as a restrictive measure, but as an opportunity to acquire their own “cool” packs and food for special events. Let the kids in the family choose their own fun lunch bags and containers. You can even be proactive and provide all the kids with monogrammed lunch bags at your gluten-free party a few weeks prior and use this trip to choose containers that will fill it.

Week 4

The last week's trip can be spent at a bookstore where the entire family can browse and buy gluten-free cookbooks designed for children, adults and special occasions.

Week 4 and beyond: Learn about community resources

If you think that becoming a gluten-free family will alienate you, think again! Today, more and more families are choosing to go gluten-free and, over time, you'll realize this simply by talking to other moms and dads. Seek out other parents that have made the same gluten-free family decision, attend resource groups geared toward families or better yet, start your own. Exposing your children to other gluten-free kids will help them to see this process as something that is normal and not out of the ordinary.

Becoming a gluten-free family should be easy. As a dietitian, you have the opportunity to both educate and assist with what may initially appear to be a very daunting task for moms and dads. Hopefully, with your guidance, and this four-week plan, your patients will embrace the challenge and, over time, reap the gluten-free benefits!