

# How to advocate for your needs

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Having a lifelong autoimmune condition, illness or disease, no matter what it is, requires that you learn to advocate for your needs.

If you do not learn to speak up for yourself and make your needs known, you will likely have **less support, less understanding and less empathy.**

As a Celiac, we are responsible for educating others about our condition. This is what helps people how to **best support and care for our needs.**

Of course, this needs to be done in a **kind and tactful** way. Being forceful, rude or demanding about it won't win you any respect or help.

Let's see in what areas we need to advocate for ourselves:

1. Social needs
2. Cross contamination needs
3. Emotional needs
4. support needs

## **Social Needs**

For someone with Celiac disease, social events can become quite stressful. Especially large gatherings, functions or events where no catering or food options are available and even if gluten-free options are, we just have no idea how they were prepared.

You will have to learn to **voice your concerns** when it is appropriate but also understand that there may be times that you need to take your own food with.

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Taking your own food with can often be the least stressful way to deal with social events because then you at least know it is safe because you prepared it and you can relax and enjoy the event.

However, **don't be shy to ask**. There is no harm in asking the host, event planner, caterer etc if it is possible to safely prepare your gluten-free meal. If the answer is no or met with hesitation and a lack of understanding, then you know to take along your own food.

## Cross contamination needs

This was already partly discussed, but once again, advocating for your needs in this regard is of utmost importance and again education and awareness is our responsibility. Friends and family may be quite willing to make gluten-free options **but do they know how to do to avoid cross contamination?** Your explanation on how to do so will serve your interests well.

When it comes to restaurants, we are unaware of what is going on in the kitchen. But a **brief explanation** (or showing the chef your dining card) can do much to explain your needs. You will need to play this one by ear as the reaction or willingness to cooperate will differ greatly between establishments.

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## Emotional needs

Celiac Disease, like any life long condition, puts a lot of strain on the emotions, because of the way it isolates us socially. It is also **draining** having to read labels every single time we shop, having to phone ahead and find out things from restaurants, having to explain the same thing over and over again. It is tiring having to be constantly vigilant about cross contamination at home, when traveling, when at friends.

This can often lead to a type of **burnout**.

It is important that you don't underestimate this and that you **take time to relax, to talk** to an understanding friend or your spouse or family member or even go for **therapy**.

Having people you trust to **cook and shop** for you to take the load off this constant vigilance is also helpful and I really recommend you train those that live with you to do this. My husband does the shopping on weekends and he is fully trained in label reading so I know I do not have to worry about it and it gives me a much needed break.

The take away is **REST and TALK**. And if you can't do either, then **write** your emotions down, but make sure you get it out. It can be overwhelming and frustrating as well as draining.

## Support Needs

Only you know how you need support and it is vital you recognize in what areas you need that support and learn to ask for help where needed.