



Catholics with Celiac Disease

Celiac Disease, or Celiac Sprue, is an inherited auto-immune condition estimated to affect 1 in 133 people in the U.S. causing intolerance to gluten, the protein in wheat. Catholics with this condition face a unique challenge for the Sacrament of Eucharist.

What is Celiac Disease?

Celiac Disease causes the body to attack the lining of the small intestine and other organs when triggered by the ingestion of certain proteins found in the cereal grains of wheat, rye, and barley. In addition to intestinal damage, celiac disease can lead to other chronic illnesses, like cancer and diabetes.

Physicians are still learning how to diagnose and treat this condition, once believed to be a rare childhood illness. The incidence of Celiac Disease is increasing as more sensitive blood tests are being developed. Currently the only treatment for Celiac Disease is to adopt a gluten-free diet. This is very difficult because even food considered gluten-free may have trace amounts that trigger the immune system.

Tips for Ministers of Holy Communion

- Canon law requires that altar bread used for Eucharist be made of wheat and water.
- Gluten-free hosts made of rice, corn, or tapioca starch are not valid matter for Eucharist.
- It is acceptable for Celiacs to receive Holy Communion under the species of wine only.
- Consecrated wine is safe for Celiacs if it has not come in contact with hosts.
- Use extreme care to avoid mixing the sacred species at the altar or Communion station.
- Low-gluten hosts may be used with permission from the Bishop and can be ordered from the Congregation of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, 1-800-223-2772, www.benedictinesisters.org.
- Acknowledge the feelings of loss and exclusion Catholics with Celiac disease may experience.

Tips for Catholics with Celiac Disease

- Tell your pastor about your condition.
- Check with your doctor before consuming low-gluten hosts.
- Educate your parish community about your needs.

Source: Catholic Celiac Society, www.catholicceliacs.org

For more information contact Marsha Rivas, Equal Access Ministries, Diocese of Toledo, 419-244-6711, mrivas@toledodiocese.org.

