



MAKING THE CONNECTION

Finding Support for the Gluten Free Life

Angie Halten

Gluten Free Club

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FINDING SUPPORT FOR THE GLUTEN FREE LIFE

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GlutenFreeClub.com

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1 INTRODUCTION

Very few people like feeling alone, and that's especially true when you know that being with people with similar interests enhances life experiences. When you have a hobby or a special interest or activity you enjoy doing, the natural inclination is to find other people to share the time or activities with on a regular basis. The result is the formation of clubs, societies, associations and support groups.

Of course, for many years support groups were used mostly for medical reasons. For example, psychologists and psychiatrists held support group meetings so people could learn to interact with other people while sharing their thoughts and concerns. The idea of support groups has continued to grow and now there are support groups for every kind of need, hobby, concern and activity. There are support groups for the newly divorced, new parents, cancer survivors and for people with depression. You name it and there's a support group available.

For those people with celiac disease or gluten intolerance, feeling alone is one of the many common emotional reactions to the diagnosis. Though most people cope every day and are well-adjusted in their gluten free lifestyle, the emotional ramifications are always lurking beneath the surface. Being unable to fully participate on the same level as everyone else when food is served is a constant reminder of being "different". We live in a society that revolves around food in many situations. Just think about weddings, birthday parties, holidays and office meetings, and you begin to realize how often food is present.

If you feel as if the whole world is revolving, and you're standing still, then a support group is the perfect solution. There's nothing more uplifting then to recognize your emotions and feelings in other people. It's like discovering you're not alone in any sense of the word. But support groups are for all people who are gluten intolerant, and not just those with specific emotional issues. The reason is living gluten free is a lifestyle and not just a hobby or a single issue.

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Support groups used to be just a group of people who met periodically at a designated place. That concept has changed with the internet. Now people can "meet" on the internet and correspond regularly. There are chat rooms, forums, cyber newsletters, listservs and online support groups. Of course, there are still plenty of traditional support groups also. They meet at local club houses, in people's homes, at community

centers, and at many other places. Meetings may be small informal sessions or large conferences.

Support groups and forums provide an invaluable service to its members. You can share information, ask questions, offer suggestions and keep abreast of the latest research. You can get great tips and ideas that other people have developed as they too learn to live gluten free. Since the gluten free lifestyle affects every aspect of your life, it's great to listen to others who have come up with creative ideas to make the gluten free lifestyle healthy and interesting.

Of course, you can also learn about the mistakes people have made, which makes it much easier for you to avoid them in your life. You can learn how others were accidentally exposed to gluten or how they overcame an obstacle to living gluten free. If you get nothing else from a support group, you'll discover how creatively people have addressed the gluten free lifestyle.

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The common emotional reactions and struggles that people face while living the gluten free lifestyle don't seem so overwhelming when you can share with others the same issues. When you join a support group, either locally or online, you're never alone again. You always have people you can turn to with questions, concerns or information.

The human experience is such that men and women are not meant to deal with any issue in life alone. You never have to feel as if you've lost control of your life or that you are now expected to figure out how to live gluten free on your own. There are millions of others in the world who are looking for someone just like you. They're looking for someone who wants to make living the gluten free lifestyle as healthy and as interesting as possible. There's no reason to recreate the wheel, so to speak. By listening to, and learning from others, you can keep rolling along as smoothly as possible.

2 NEEDING HELP

TYPES OF FORUMS AND SUPPORT GROUPS

If you're one of those people who have always avoided joining groups of any kind, then it may be you've decided a gluten free living support group is not for you. If you're thinking along those lines then you're really cheating yourself out of a great resource. Forums and support groups offer ways to meet people with similar interests, easily find new information, and learn innovative ways to deal with problems encountered related to gluten free living. The best news is that you don't have to even meet your support group members face-to-face if that's what's holding you back. You can join an online support group and chat with complete strangers.

SUPPORT GROUPS

The first question is: What exactly is a support group? A support group is a group of people who have a common interest or life issue. In a support group, people get together and share their particular experiences related to the interest or issue. The groups are all about communication.

- Outlet for expressing feelings of frustration or confusion
- Forum for sharing personal experiences
- Ability to network with other people
- Chance to share problem solving ideas

The main advantage of joining a support group is the sharing of information between people dealing with the same problems, issues, concerns and successes. When you join a support group for people with Celiac disease or gluten intolerance, you're communicating with the people who understand exactly what you are going through. Probably one of the first comments you hear new support group members says is: "I thought I was all alone until now!"

Some people decide to go it alone. In most cases, people who decide to not take advantage of a support group, do so out of fear of embarrassment. For example, it's not always easy talking about some of the symptoms related to gluten intolerance. But isolating yourself is not the answer. It's always good to know there are many others experiencing the exact same problems. The best news though is that many of them have uncovered ways to make the symptoms more bearable until your diet eliminates them all together. This is the kind of great information you can find through a support group.

There are plenty of good reasons to join a support group.

- Anonymity outside of circle of friends and family
- More comfortable talking to people without a vested interest
- Can be totally honest
- Learn new ideas
- Find new resources
- Feel comforted through support

As you'll read later, there are many other reasons also for joining a support group that are related to making life a lot easier.

Support groups used to involve meetings at designated places. You had to physically drive to the meeting place. In fact, you can still do so if you wish, but some people simply refuse to join a support group due to time restrictions. Fortunately there's an alternative thanks to technology. You can join an online support group such as The Gluten Free Club found at www.glutenfreeclub.net on the internet.

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An online support group eliminates all of the reasons for not joining a support group. In fact, an online group offers an enhanced experience over the traditional support group.

- Increased anonymity because there are no face-to-face meetings

NEEDING HELP

- No time limitations because can access information whenever you have free time
- More frequent information updates than you get attending a monthly meeting
- World-wide access to people with common issues instead of just interacting with local members
- Greater number of creative ideas due to access to larger number of people from all walks of life

Of course, not every support group is ideal for your situation. You want to join a support group that deals with issues specific to your life, but also helps you look outside the circle. That's the only way you can be exposed to new refreshing ideas.

FORUMS

An online forum is actually a kind of online support group. With an online forum you go to a website and then log into an open discussion. You can ask questions or respond to questions others have posted. You can get or give advice. You can read new information and find new resources. Best of all, you can meet people online who are dealing with the same issues you are handling. Making new friends is always great, but knowing in advance you have ways to help each other is wonderful.

Forums usually work in one of two ways. One some forums you post a question or answer a question one post a time. The Gluten Free Club forum is an excellent example of this type of forum. Some forums use emails to send and receive questions and answers. Forums dedicated to the gluten free lifestyle offer a wealth of information about every topic under the sun from the first diagnosis to creative ways to handle difficult situations.

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On forums, there are different threads of discussion. Each thread is assigned to a particular heading so you can easily start a new thread or jump into an existing one. Unlike email forums, the forums where you can post your questions and answers require you to visit the website. With an email forum you can just add your name to the email list and then begin asking and answering questions through emails. You'll also get periodic emails with research and product news related to gluten free living.

Usually, you'll get more information when you visit a website. Forums are just one segment of a website. Others include posted articles, products for sale and updates on living gluten free. It's a great way to make sure you're getting all the information you need to live a successful gluten free lifestyle. In order to join a forum, you must register with the website.

When you visit a forum online, you'll discover that the posts are sorted by topic. For example, on the [Gluten Free Club](#) website you'll find dozens of topics with questions and answers organized within the topic. You don't have to spend hours reading information you're not currently interested in and can zoom in on the discussion of interest. The kinds of topics you'll find on this site and on sites like [Celiac.com](#) include the following.

- Initial diagnosis
- Doctors
- Celiac kids
- Symptoms
- Pregnancy
- Informational resources
- Medical research
- Baking gluten free
- Weight problems
- Restaurants
- Medications
- Labeling
- Sports and Fitness
- Travel

There are so many possible topics, but these are the most common ones. Every gluten free website will offer different formats, but they work in similar ways. Forums are a great resource for everyone living gluten free.

LISTSERVS

A listserv is an internet based forum that uses emails for communication. You join a listserv that's dedicated to topics related to Celiac disease. When you join, you send your email address, and that's the address that will be used to send you email with information, news, questions and answers. The emails are delivered to anyone who's registered and each posting also appears on a web page as a threaded discussion.

NEEDING HELP

A threaded discussion is one that has postings listed by time and date. In other words, the most recent postings appear first. In some cases, the poster will summarize all the responses for the readers making it easy to read the answers. But just like any online forum, you can't automatically believe everything you read just because it's been posted on the internet.

When you're looking for new gluten free products or recipes, you can save some time by looking for positive responses. If someone asks if a particular recipe makes a good dish and the summary responses are all positive, you're probably on the right track.

CHAT ROOMS AND INSTANT MESSAGING

Chat rooms are a kind of forum. As you can tell, support groups, forums and chat rooms all have the same primary purpose. They each give people the opportunity to share and exchange information on a particular topic. In a chat room dedicated to gluten related topics, people can literally "chat" online. It's an early form of instant messaging as you see the information being typed into the chat room. You are sending text messages in real time. The people you are corresponding with must be in the same chat room of course.

Most websites operating a chat room require the participants to register.

NEWSLETTERS

Newsletters are another way people are able to get regular information on gluten free living. Most newsletters require adding your name to an email list and the newsletter is automatically sent each time it's updated. Or the newsletter can be posted on a website and you must check the website periodically.

Newsletters are included as one of the means of finding support, because the information is directed to a particular group of people. The newsletter often offers ways to contact others with questions so you can get more in-depth information.

EVERYONE NEEDS HELP

Everyone needs help at some time in their life. How much help you need just depends on the situation. When you're diagnosed as being gluten intolerant, it's a diagnosis you'll deal with the rest of your life. That's not meant to sound grim or make you feel badly. It's just a fact. Another fact is that being gluten intolerant affects most aspects of your life. It's a very encompassing diagnosis. For these two reasons alone, you should not try to live gluten free without help.

It would be very time consuming and difficult to learn everything you need to know on your own. Even if you spend hours doing research, there'll still be gaps in your knowledge. In addition, other people can be so creative and helpful. Your support group members, like those found on the [Gluten Free Club](#), have developed new ways to deal with problems. Many of them have also completed a lot of the research that would be helpful to you..

Following is a list of reasons why it's not good to live gluten free without help.

- **Support groups help to increase the general awareness of Celiac disease and gluten intolerance**

There are still doctors who are not aware of the extent of the occurrences of gluten intolerance. The more people join together to spread the word and share information, the faster more people will learn about the diagnosis.

- **Support groups and forums make it much easier to stay current on the latest issues and research**

Research on gluten intolerance has not been a priority in the past, because doctors didn't realize how many people have gluten intolerance. Have you ever heard of a "Gluten Intolerance Fund Raiser"? But as more people are diagnosed, the pace of research increases. That means you want to stay current on the latest findings, and support groups and forums offer an ideal way to find out about new research.

Support groups and forums make it much easier to stay current on the latest issues and research.

- **People in support groups have new ideas for handling the gluten free lifestyle**

The old expression, "Necessity is the mother of invention", is true. You may have never considered taking your own gluten free pasta to a particular local restaurant that is happy to cook it for you when dining out. But a support group member can tell you which chain restaurant that is in his or her area made that accommodation. The gluten free lifestyle can be greatly simplified in many ways, but you can't think of everything on your own.

NEEDING HELP

- **Sometimes we need emotional support just because we're human**
A support group provides important encouragement when you need it the most. In fact, a support group can offer empathy which your family member's are unable to offer simply because your family is not gluten intolerant.
- **There are many special situations in people's lives that require adaptation of the gluten free lifestyle**
For example, just to give you an idea, the following are special topics.
 - Feeding infants on a gluten free diet
 - Finding gluten free school supplies
 - Teenagers and peer pressure
 - College students away from home for the first time
 - Traveling
 - Senior citizens who are diagnosed late in life
 - Balancing diets for more than one autoimmune disease

As mentioned, these are just a few of the special topics that require creative approaches to living gluten free. The more ideas you can find for dealing with the day-to-day requirements of living gluten free, the easier it will be to maintain a gluten free lifestyle. It's no secret that you'll be tempted every day by foods containing gluten, especially if you're still in the transition stage. An online support group is always there for you whenever you need the emotional support.

TOPICS COVERED IN GLUTEN FREE FORUMS AND SUPPORT GROUPS

There are plenty of other autoimmune diseases and allergies that are experienced by people with gluten intolerance and Celiac disease.

with gluten intolerance and Celiac disease.

Websites such as the [Gluten Free Club](#) are for all kinds of people with a variety of issues related to wheat. You don't have to be diagnosed with full blown Celiac disease in order to be in need of support. Gluten intolerance is a complex medical problem that can take many different forms. In addition, there are plenty of other autoimmune diseases and allergies that are experienced by people

As a result, websites such as [The Gluten Free Forum](#), the [Gluten Free Club](#) and [Celiac.Com](#) discuss many issues besides those strictly related to gluten.

- Celiac disease is definitively diagnosed through a biopsy. Eventually, medical researchers hope to find a less-invasive means of diagnosing Celiac disease, but for now that's the only way to get a 100% accurate diagnosis. Obviously, anyone who's been diagnosed with Celiac disease should join a support group for all the reasons discussed earlier.
- People diagnosed as gluten intolerant may or may not have had the biopsy. There are blood tests that indicate with high probability whether someone is gluten intolerant, but may or may not actually get a biopsy done. Other people just haven't had the biopsy done yet. The important thing to note is that once you know you're gluten intolerant, even if you don't have full blown Celiac disease, your lifestyle will have to change. This means you should join a support group either online or in your local area as soon as possible. Gluten intolerance doesn't wait for the "right time". You should stop eating gluten right away and find out what other changes should be made in your life.
- People with a wheat allergy don't have an autoimmune disease. Their intestinal systems are not affected by eating gluten. But they do have a reaction to the wheat gluten which can be severe depending on what kind of reactions occur. For example, some people experience difficulties breathing. Like any allergy, when something makes you sick, it's important to stay away from it. In this case that means avoiding gluten. People with wheat allergies can benefit greatly from joining a gluten free support group or forum.
- There are other autoimmune diseases, intolerances, allergies and so on that show up in people with gluten intolerance. These include autoimmune liver disease, lupus, Raynaud's Syndrome, Addison's disease, Sjögren's disease, Dermatitis Herpetiformis, Diabetes, Lactose Intolerance, osteoporosis and a host of other health problems. Balancing your diet and lifestyle to accommodate several medical conditions can be greatly simplified just by learning from others who have adjusted their lifestyles already.

3 SUPPORT GROUPS

If you have read to this point then you understand the reasons why you should join a local or online support group. One thing you'll discover as you learn to live a gluten free lifestyle is that you'll want to take advantage of every opportunity to make life a little easier. Living gluten free is healthy and invigorating, but it also requires constant vigilance. It'd be nice if we were always in a good mood and never tempted to cheat, but that would only happen in a perfect world. It would also be nice if we had all the answers to the issues related to gluten free living. You'll never have all the answers, but you can certainly get a lot of them through a support group.

Once you decide to find support for your lifestyle, the next step is understanding how to take full advantage of the information offered. This leads to the question of what exactly does a support group offer in the way of information? Besides offering general support, what exactly do support groups focus on? What are their advantages and disadvantages? How do you decide if you should join a local or online support group? These are the questions discussed in the next sections.

MULTIPLE TOPICS

As discussed earlier, no two people with gluten intolerance have the identical set of issues.

Support groups provide a golden opportunity to access a single group or website and find information on multiple topics. As discussed earlier, no two people with gluten intolerance have the identical set of issues. You may have questions about your diet, ingredients, dining out, or raising a Celiac kid. A support group

addresses multiple topics related to gluten intolerance but also to issues about living a healthy life. For example, you may wonder which vegetables are the best ones to include in your diet. Or you may need ideas for things you can do to improve your sleep patterns.

The truth is you can find information on just about any topic you're interested in reading about.

- Recipes
 - Breakfast, lunch or dinner
 - Eating to lose or gain weight

- Meals which restore vitamin and mineral deficiencies
- Good gluten free party foods
- How to use gluten free flour substitutes
- How to prevent breads and cakes from being too dry
- How to plan meals
- Cooking tips
- New gluten free recipes developed by people with gluten intolerance
- Making snacks that are gluten free
- Cooking gluten free desserts that taste delicious

- Stores
 - Where to find gluten free foods
 - Which specialty stores in your local area carry gluten free foods
 - How to control your food expenses
 - How to read labels
 - Experiences with particular brands
 - Online gluten free shopping
 - How to get information from a manufacturer

- Restaurants
 - How to find places serving gluten free meals
 - How to interpret how a menu item was cooked
 - How to inform the waiter you're gluten intolerant
 - How to talk to the chef about your special diet needs
 - How to eat at restaurants while traveling

- Personal Stories
 - How I handled dealing with the initial diagnosis
 - How I keep my Celiac child safe at school
 - How I found a doctor knowledgeable about gluten intolerance
 - How I handle gluten accidents
 - What I did when the symptoms didn't go away on a gluten free diet
 - How I learned by child has Celiac disease
 - Overcoming depression
 - Handling feelings of isolation

- General Information
 - New gluten free shopping websites
 - Learning what are myths and what are truths

SUPPORT GROUPS

- Keeping a kitchen gluten free over time
- How to keep gluten free food separated from other foods
- How to keep your food safe at the office
- How to respond to family members that don't believe you have to avoid all gluten

ALWAYS USE INFORMATION CAUTIOUSLY

You should make every effort to join a reliable support group that makes a sincere effort to provide reliable information.

When you join a support group either locally or online, it's important to understand several things. A support group is a group anyone can join. What that means is anyone can say anything they like within the discussion threads online or at support meetings. You should make every effort to join a reliable support group that makes a sincere effort to provide reliable

information. In other words, the credibility of information must be questioned when you read advice that involves eating potential gluten. For example, if a person swears a particular brand is gluten free, but the bottle label doesn't back up the claim, then you need to check the information for yourself. You can call the manufacturer or do your own label reading.

In other words, joining a support group doesn't relieve you of responsibility for verifying the facts. If someone makes a claim that's unfamiliar you have every right to ask for the source of their information. Also, when you're reading information on the internet, make sure you check the date of publication. Information stays on the internet seemingly forever and gluten research is ongoing. In fact, some myths continue to persist in the gluten free world for some strange reason. For example, some people insist distilled vinegar has gluten in it even though the distillation process makes it impossible for the gluten molecule to make its way into the final product.

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

There are many countries that have major support groups that focus on all aspects of gluten free living. You can find recipes, forums, articles, current research, safe and unsafe food lists and much more online. But many of these organizations also have local chapters where you can attend meetings. As discussed earlier, it's your decision as to whether you want to attend local meetings or simply take advantage of online clubs such as the [Gluten Free Club](#).

Of course, millions of people do both. They join a local chapter of a national organization and then also register with a favorite online site dedicated to gluten free living. The benefit of this approach is you have multiple sources for checking and verifying information or for asking questions. You just can't have access to too much information! That's like saying you have too much of a good thing and we know that's not possible (unless it's eating too many gluten free desserts).

Following is a list of major national and international support groups.

- **United States**
 - American Celiac Society (www.americanceliacsociety.org)
 - Gluten Intolerance Group (www.gluten.net)
 - Celiac Sprue Association (www.csaceliacs.org)
 - Celiac Disease Foundation (www.celiac.org)
 - Raising Our Celiac Kids (R.O.C.K.) (www.celiackids.com)

- **Canada**
 - Canadian Celiac Association (www.celiac.ca)

- **Australia**
 - Coeliac Society of South Australia (www.coeliac.org.au)

There are national support groups around the world, and when you travel they are a great source of information. When you travel overseas, it's almost imperative you plan ahead when it comes to eating. You need to understand the country's customs and cooking techniques. The quickest way to learn about a foreign country's food, restaurants and cooking methods is by contacting one of the country's national Celiac or gluten intolerance support groups.

The quickest way to learn about a foreign country's food, restaurants and cooking methods is by contacting one of the country's national Celiac or gluten intolerance support groups.

Chapters of national organizations can be quite large in some cities. They local meetings include vendors who set up booths and lots of gluten free food. In smaller cities or towns, the group meetings may not be as elaborate. But even small groups can offer speakers, research news and great food. So just because a local group is small, don't summarily dismiss it as being just a social club.

CHOOSING A LOCAL SUPPORT GROUP VERSUS AN ONLINE GROUP

There has been some discussion about the difference between the local support group and the online support group. There are some advantages and disadvantages to both.

For people who are more comfortable talking to people face-to-face, a local support group is a good choice. Also, local chapters of support groups often invite guest speakers and provide plenty of time to socialize. If you need that kind of interaction and have time to attend meetings, a local support group is a good choice.

Many people, though, don't have enough time in their busy schedules to attend local support group meetings, or they're unable to get to meetings for one reason or another. In many cases, there is no local support group at all. In either case, the online support group offers the opportunity to belong to a group with a common cause. The online support group provides an easy way to obtain information, and to ask and answer questions. One of the primary advantages is the online support group can be accessed whenever you have time. You don't have to wait for a meeting. In fact, you can ask a question and then check back later to see if anyone offered answers. It's the ultimate in convenience.

In addition, the online support group gives you access to a global network of people with gluten intolerance or Celiac disease. Anyone from anywhere in the world can join an online club such as the [Gluten Free Club](#) which means you gain access to international perspectives, new ideas for living gluten free, and in some cases, the most current research news. For example, Europe has recognized the widespread occurrence of Celiac disease for many years and in terms of legislation is ahead of the United States.

INCLUDING THE FAMILY

For people who must live a gluten free lifestyle, one question always seems to come up. That question is this: Should my family also live gluten free? The answer depends on your circumstances and family needs. But a caveat to this question is this: Should my family attend support group meetings? I think the answer to this question is easier: Yes!

If you choose to join a national chapter of a gluten free group, it would be great if your spouse and other family members went with you to meetings. The main reason is that the more your family learns, the easier it will be for them to help you stay gluten free. Many people have problems explaining the importance of living totally gluten free to their families. When they attend local meetings, the family will be able to talk to other people who are going through the same things.

But even an online support group can be of tremendous assistance to family members. When you join an online support group like the Gluten Free Club, your family can submit questions online also or you can ask questions for them. The more you include your family in your gluten free lifestyle, without making them feel as if they are sacrificing, the easier it will be to live gluten free.

STARTING YOUR OWN GROUP

If you can't find a local support group and really wish to belong to one, you have another option. You can start your own group! You have two choices actually. You can start your own independent group or you can start a chapter of a national organization. Of course, it's much easier to join an existing group, but chapters need active and interested people. You would be doing your area a real service by deciding to start a new gluten free chapter or group, because one of the remaining problems with Celiac disease is broadcasting the information to all people. There are still so many people suffering with digestive problems that are actually gluten intolerant.

If you want to start a local chapter of a national organization, you need to contact the group first. National organizations are well prepared to provide assistance. They will post your chapter on their national site and provide information you need to begin a group.

If you decide to start your own independent group, of course you're starting from "scratch". You'll have to do everything including creating your support group name. Of course, whether you start a local chapter of a national organization or an independent group, you need to be dedicated to the cause. It takes a lot of time to start a group.

- Advertise the existence of your new group
- Set up meeting times and place
- Create meeting agenda
- Research topics
- Find guest speakers

SUPPORT GROUPS

- Plan special events

When you start a local support group, you'll soon discover you get lots of phone calls and emails too.

When you start a local support group, you'll soon discover you get lots of phone calls and emails too. You will initially be the primary contact for all group questions and will be spending a lot of time answering questions. Eventually, as your group grows, you can share the duties but the reality is the founder of a group can expect to be in charge for several years.

Before you decide to start a local gluten free group, you need to take into consideration several things. First, you need to be very comfortable with living gluten free. Anyone who joins your group is going to expect you to be knowledgeable about Celiac disease and gluten intolerance.

Second, you'll have to be able to spend as much time as necessary keeping abreast of the latest research. As research efforts expand, there will be more information on a regular basis. Your group members will look to you for direction and will have questions if they do their own research. For a group to be effective you have to be helpful and the information you share must be relevant.

Also, you shouldn't even consider forming a group unless you're fairly organized yourself. Holding group meetings requires lots of planning in every aspect from setting the time and date to posting the agenda to keeping the meeting within the allotted time. Your family should support your efforts too, because you'll probably have the first meetings in your home. Even if you choose a public place, you'll be spending a lot of time in your home preparing materials. A great deal of your time will be devoted to getting the group off the ground, and it's important your loved ones support your efforts.

If you decide you'd like to start a new group after considering the time and effort it will require, there are lots of benefits your members will experience.

- Make lots of new friends
- Organize local resources including doctors and stores
- Help others learn to live gluten free

You might even prevent some people from becoming depressed over their diagnosis, which is a common reaction. At your meetings you can talk about a variety of topics.

- New research

- Great recipes
- Local stores
- Finding medical resources
- Family support
- Share news about regional and national meetings and conferences
- Focusing on a specific topic through a guest speaker
- Common myths
- Resource recommendations – books, magazines etc.

To find members for your group initially, you'll have to find ways to advertise. An inexpensive way to advertise is to hang flyers in places where gluten intolerant people shop such as in health stores or in doctor's offices.

There's no reason for anyone to feel alone in their quest to live gluten free. There are so many different options for finding support both locally and online. You can find the forum or support group which fits your lifestyle best. The more you stay in touch with other people with Celiac disease or gluten intolerance, the easier it will be to stay the course. There are a lot of nice people in the world, and they want to help others by sharing information. The internet has made it possible.

4 CONCLUSION

Learning to live gluten free is a life changing experience. Many people react to their diagnosis with disbelief first, and then they go home and are overwhelmed with the thought of all that needs to be done. The kitchen has to be cleaned, all the food must be evaluated in terms of content, the family must be taught the new rules, and the shopping routines must be thrown out the window. At some point, you'll have to learn how to keep yourself healthy when eating at a restaurant, parties or other people's homes. Oh! So much to learn!

It's not unusual to not only be overwhelmed at times, but to feel very isolated. People with gluten intolerance or Celiac disease find themselves feeling blue frequently and many slide into depression. These feelings often occur right after diagnosis and then again after living gluten free for a period, such as a year or two. Living gluten free is a healthy way to live, but it does take a lot of vigilance and pre-planning.

Gluten free support groups can go a long way towards helping anyone deal with the problems they encounter trying to live the gluten free lifestyle. But even more important, support groups offer friendship and emotional support that begins on common ground. Members of support groups don't have to worry about finding something in common. Everyone is either diagnosed with Celiac disease, gluten intolerance or has a family member who must live gluten free. From this common springboard arises a wealth of information and emotional support that makes life much easier.

Support groups can take many forms today. They can be chapters of national organizations, independent clubs, online clubs (such as the [Gluten Free Club](#)), listservs, email forums and chat rooms. Most gluten free websites combine forums, reports on new research, offer great new recipes and even have spots where you can talk about non-gluten free issues. This is in recognition of the fact that your life is not only about living gluten free. As human beings, we must balance our bodies, minds and spirits in a way that keeps us healthy and happy.

When you belong to a support group, there's one thing you're assured of getting – lots of answers!

The internet has created so much opportunity for everyone to belong to a support group. You can read other people's stories, get new and creative ideas for dealing with difficult issues, learn how others have handled different situations, and how people have gained family support. You can ask any question you want about doctors, recipes, restaurants and hundreds of other topics. When you belong to a support group, there's one thing you're assured of getting – lots of answers!