

After years of being misdiagnosed, Stephanie finally learned she had celiac disease last year and has learned to adjust her diet since

Living the Good Life... Gluten- Free

Sugar Land sufferers of celiac disease share support, resources, and gluten-free tips and suggestions

*Written by Tonya Ellis
Photography by Suzi Issa*



Growing up, Karen Tipton of Sugar Land wasn't a fan of pizza or sandwiches like most other kids. About 18 years ago, she learned why. "I got so sick - it was profound," she says, describing the severe abdominal cramping and sickness she experienced. "I lost 18 pounds in six weeks, and my muscles were atrophying."

After a battery of tests including a stomach biopsy, Tipton was diagnosed with celiac disease, a digestive disorder that manifests when patients eat or drink items containing wheat, barley, rye, or oats. The grains contain gluten, a protein that damages the small intestine's villi, thus preventing nutrients from being absorbed. That's why foods like pizza, cakes, bread, pasta, bagels, or beer are off limits to celiac sufferers.

Tipton, who has one adopted child, attributes struggles with fertility to the disorder and believes the anemia she suffered during pregnancy with her first child was an unrecognized sign of the condition. Today, she is thriving with her disease. "Nowadays, it's not so hard; there are lots of gluten-free products available," she shares.

Since celiac is genetic, sometimes several members in the family are affected. Those affected with celiac are born with it, and there's no cure. "You can't take that gene away," says Dr. Louis Pottkotter, a Sugar Land area pediatrician, who diagnoses and treats pediatric celiac patients. "Once you become gluten-free you will see a 100% cure in symptoms," he adds. Dr. Pottkotter has seen the amazing results a gluten-free diet can make in the lives of children with celiac, allowing them to quickly recover from symptoms.

Janet Rinehart, chairman of the Houston Celiac Support Group, was diagnosed as a baby after she failed to thrive. Born during World War II, little was known about the disease. "I had to eat nine bananas a day for two years," she says. Rinehart definitely doesn't let celiac slow her down these days. She has traveled to all seven continents and uses a special travel club that offers gluten-free meals to members on cruises and tours.

A celiac diagnosis isn't as grim as it may seem, says Dr. Gregory Shannon, a Sugar Land area gastroenterologist. "Most patients have an 'oh no, not me' response to being diagnosed with this disorder," he describes. "They often feel like the 'special diet' is a problem and doesn't quite fit into their lifestyle. This is usually short-lived, since the number of available products that are gluten-free has exploded. In most cases, this anxiety is laid to rest once the patient starts to feel remarkably better on a gluten-free diet." SLM

TONYA ELLIS enjoys feature writing and spending time with her husband and three children.



Sugar Land Gluten-Free Dining Guide

Check out these Sugar Land area restaurants that serve at least one gluten-free menu item.

<p>Carrabba's Italian Grill 2335 Hwy. 6, Missouri City</p> <p>Cheesecake Factory 16535 S.W. Fwy., Sugar Land</p> <p>Corelli's Italian Café 2335 Hwy. 6, Sugar Land</p> <p>Fish City Grill 15980 City Walk, Sugar Land</p> <p>Jason's Deli 15275 S.W. Fwy., Sugar Land</p> <p>Johnny Carino's 5750 Hwy. 6, Missouri City</p> <p>Kona Grill 16535 S.W. Fwy., Sugar Land</p>	<p>Pei Wei 16101 Kensington Dr., Sugar Land</p> <p>Pepperoni's 3721 Hwy. 6, Missouri City</p> <p>Pepperoni's 5726 New Territory Blvd., Sugar Land</p> <p>Pepperoni's 11102 S. Hwy. 6, Sugar Land</p> <p>P.F. Chang's China Bistro 2120 Lone Star Dr., Sugar Land</p> <p>Post Oak Grill 1415 S. Post Oak Ln., Sugar Land</p>
--	---



Janet Rinehart and fellow celiac Karen Tipton at Pepperoni's, which has a gluten-free menu. It's been 18 years since Karen last had pizza.



Stephanie learned how to cook gluten-free meals when she went away to college and makes sure to read every label at the grocery store.