



# Gabriel Mansfield

At seven years of age, Gabriel Mansfield can explain how one inherits genes and how the body breaks down proteins. This is not general knowledge for most seven-year-olds, but Gabriel is not like most other kids his age: he has an inherited genetic disorder called phenylketonuria or PKU.

Every child in the United States is screened for phenylketonuria or PKU at birth due to the dire consequences if the disease is left untreated. Gabriel was the one out of every 14,000 babies that would test positive. PKU is an inherited genetic disorder that causes protein from food to bottleneck in the brain. This protein begins to destroy the protective coating around the neurotransmitters. If not treated, the build up results in severe and irreversible mental retardation.

The day after the diagnosis, Gabriel's parents made the three-hour drive to The Children's Hospital in Denver from their Laramie, WY home. The Mansfields were greeted at Children's by a team of specialists, including a genetic counselor and a dietician. They spent an entire day at Children's learning about PKU. Most importantly, they learned about treatment.

The treatment for PKU consists of a specialized diet made up of a metabolic formula that Gabriel drinks daily, and that he will require for the rest of his life. This formula provides him with all the protein he needs. Each piece of food that Gabriel eats must to be monitored for protein content and measured on a food scale. Gabriel must also supply weekly blood samples to Children's so that his protein levels can be monitored and his diet modified if needed. This special diet and the monitoring of Gabriel's protein levels will continue throughout his entire life.

Gabriel is proud that he is different and does not let his PKU slow him down. "He makes the Energizer Bunny look lazy," comments Tina. Gabriel has a passion for life and enjoys soccer, recently scoring six goals in one game. One of Gabriel's favorite activities is going to 'group' at The Children's Hospital where every six months he has the opportunity to talk, cook, and play with other children throughout the region who have PKU.

