

Eating out with an allergy – some guidance notes



If you know that you have an allergy to a certain food, you should tell all those who prepare your food. **If your symptoms are potentially fatal, you should say so firmly and clearly.** You should also carry any emergency medication with you **AT ALL TIMES.** When you eat anything from a sandwich to a full 5 course banquet, you should **mention the fact that you have an allergy** to the most responsible person available. You should be as clear as you can about the food(s) you must avoid and should learn to read menus and other information carefully.

If you are avoiding nuts, peanuts or seeds, it is particularly difficult to eat away from the home. High risk items include breads, other bakery items and desserts, which may contain nuts both as deliberate ingredients and through trace cross-contamination. Chinese and Indian foods are very likely to contain these ingredients as well as be contaminated by them. Shellfish is also difficult to avoid in many situations including Asian foods. Cow's milk can be hidden in other guises eg whey, casein, lactose.

Most people who die from a food allergy have eaten a food which was meant to contain the allergen ingredient. It was there deliberately but unrecognised by the allergic customer.

What to do when eating out

- Advise the restaurant (in advance when possible or at least on arrival) that you have an allergy to (a) named food(s) and how serious it may be
- Read all the information available carefully
- Work out which dishes contain your problem allergen (deliberately)
- Talk to the staff, ideally in front of others who can witness your conversation.
- Ask the most responsible member of staff available whether your choice of dish is free from the allergen
- Listen carefully to the reply
- Be prepared to wait whilst they find a packet, label or ingredients folder to show you
- When you place your order, encourage staff to write down that the dish should not have any contact at all with your problem allergen eg No nuts
- Be prepared for everyone else to be served before you
- If you think you may be having a reaction, tell those with you and the most responsible member of staff. If your symptoms become more serious, you may need an emergency ambulance with resuscitation facilities. Whilst you are conscious, explain to those with you about your emergency medication – both injected and inhaled
- Whilst your immediate care is the highest priority, collecting a sample of the food may be useful afterwards. You may decide to keep two small clean plastic bags with your medication for this purpose.

What to do after surviving a bad reaction to food served away from the home

- Once you have been stabilised and undergone a full medical check, it is time to investigate the reaction.
- Collect details of anyone who was present, particularly if they witnessed your enquiries and dialogue with staff
- If you advised staff about your allergy, ate something on the understanding that it did not contain the allergen, and then suffered an allergic reaction, a criminal offence may have taken place.
- In this case, you should inform the local food enforcement department. It would be helpful to provide them with written statements – both your own and those of others who were present. These should be dated and signed with full contact details.
- If you have been able to keep any sample foods, these should be given to the food enforcement officer.
- The Anaphylaxis Campaign (01252 542029) www.anaphylaxis.org.uk may be able to offer you further advice and support. It would also be helpful for us to receive a copy of the statements collected.