

Catering for someone with a food allergy or intolerance

What is a food allergy?

A food allergy is caused by an immune response by the body in reaction to certain foods¹. True food allergy is thought to only affect a very small number of people, about 1-2% of adults². In some people, a food allergy can cause a severe reaction called anaphylaxis. An anaphylactic response can cause the throat to swell, breathing difficulties and if untreated, it can be fatal. The most common food allergic reactions are caused by milk, egg, wheat, nuts, peanuts, fish and shellfish

What is a food intolerance?

A food allergy and a food intolerance are not the same. A food intolerance is caused by a reaction to certain foods that does not involve the immune system³. An example of food intolerance is lactose intolerance where lactose, the sugar found in milk, can't be digested.

Food allergens

Under EU legislation, if an allergen is present in a product, it must be emphasised within the ingredients list on product packaging. Most manufacturers do this by highlighting the food allergen in bold, underlined and/or italic font. There are 14 allergens that must be emphasised, they are:

- Celery
- Cereals containing gluten –wheat, rye, barley, oats
- Crustaceans – such as prawns, crab, lobster
- Eggs
- Fish
- Lupin
- Milk
- Molluscs – such as mussels and oysters
- Mustard
- Tree nuts – almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, brazil, cashews, pecans, pistachios and macadamia nuts
- Peanuts
- Sesame
- Soybeans
- Sulphur dioxide/sulphites greater than 10ppm (parts per million)



Residents with food allergies

So that you can cater safely for your residents, all staff should be made aware of any existing food allergies or intolerances. This is particularly important for residents who are unable or need help to make safe food choices for themselves. It's important that there is a 'care record' clearly outlining the dietary needs of the resident. There must be a process in place to ensure dietary needs on the care record are communicated to those serving the food⁴.

Catering Tips

- Emphasise to all staff the importance of accurate allergen information. If you are ever unsure about allergen information, say so and then check, never guess about allergen information
- Check the ingredients lists of all products you buy
- Keep a copy of the ingredients list and a record of the allergy information (keep the outer packaging or ask for a product specification) of all products you buy so they can be referred to if needed.
- Keep a copy of all recipes and any changes made to them
- Suppliers may send a substitute product if the requested product is unavailable. Substitute products may have different ingredients, so always check that the ingredient information used is for the actual product being used
- When storing food, make sure products are still identifiable and that there is a clearly labelled ingredients list and allergen information available for each product
- Store nuts, peanuts and sesame (allergens associated with severe reactions) in separate, labelled containers and store them on lower shelves to reduce any risk of contamination
- Cross-contamination during preparation may happen by:
 - Food to food (touching)
 - Food to hand (handling by kitchen staff)
 - Food to equipment (sharing chopping boards)
 - Minimise the risk of cross-contamination by:
 - Cleaning hands, work surfaces, kitchen equipment and utensils thoroughly
 - Try to keep certain preparation areas nut-free
 - Only use major allergenic foods if essential

Further Information

FSA free allergy training <https://allergytraining.food.gov.uk/english/>

Chef allergy cards www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/recipe-sheet_0.pdf

Allergen meals chart www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/allergen-chart.docx

Allergen checklist www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-checklist-for-food-businesses



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References

- NHS, Food Allergy <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/food-allergy/>
- FSA, Chief Scientific Adviser's Science Report [https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fifth-csa-report-allergy%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/fifth-csa-report-allergy%20(1).pdf)
- NHS, Food Intolerance <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/food-intolerance/>
- FSA, Allergen guidance for institutional caterers <https://www.food.gov.uk/business-guidance/allergen-guidance-for-institutional-caterers>



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