

Prevent cross-contamination

- Check how ingredients have been stored – have they been in contact with other food or equipment with traces of the food allergen? Have they been “diluted” with other products containing food allergens?
- Use dedicated storage containers, cooking equipment and serving utensils (e.g. cake slices or tongs in cafes and takeout premises) for foods prepared for allergen sufferers. If that's not possible, make sure you have an effective cleaning process for the work area and equipment before it is used to prepare food that needs to be free of food allergens.

TOP TIP: REMEMBER

- Wiping and rinsing equipment and surfaces is not effective cleaning.
- Use clean/different towels for drying equipment to be used for allergen-free food.
- Wash hands before starting and returning to the preparation of food free of allergens. Thoroughly dry hands with single-use disposable towels and don't wipe hands on aprons.
- Use fresh frying oil. Oil used for other foods may have become contaminated by a food allergen, for example wheat in batter.



Allergens can kill

– lives are in
your hands



What you need to know if you work with food

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Allergens can kill – lives are in your hands

When a customer tells you they have a food allergy, take it seriously. Food allergies can be life-threatening. So, if you serve food to allergic customers you need to ensure it is safe and free of the food allergens they tell you about.

Some foods trigger allergies

A food allergy is a reaction to a protein in food. Symptoms can range from mild discomfort to a potentially life-threatening reaction like anaphylaxis (where a person's windpipe swells and they can't breathe).

Foods that most frequently cause allergic reactions include wheat, shellfish, eggs, fish, milk, tree nuts, sesame seeds, peanuts and soybeans, as well as products made from these foods. More than 90 percent of serious reactions are caused by these foods.

In total there are about 160 known foods that can cause allergic reactions. These foods include kiwifruit, avocado, banana, legumes (chickpeas, beans, lentils, peas etc), spices (e.g. mustard seed and poppy seed) and others.

TOP TIP: REMEMBER

- If there is any doubt whether a food contains even a small amount of a food allergen, tell the customer – don't guess! Food allergens can be life-threatening. Your customers' lives are in your hands.

Identify allergens in food

Most pre-packaged foods that contain the most common food allergens must declare them in their list of ingredients.

These allergens are:

- wheat;
- crustacea and crustacea products (crab, prawn, crayfish);
- eggs and egg products;
- fish and fish products (including shellfish);
- milk and milk products;
- peanuts and soybeans (including their products);
- tree nuts and sesame seeds and their products.

If you prepare food, such as a sandwich, or cook a dish to order, you should be able to identify what has gone into it. Use the recipe, ingredient labels and information provided by your suppliers to understand what allergens may be present.

Even tiny amounts of a food allergen may trigger a severe reaction. So, make sure there are no trace amounts present from cross-contamination – from food surfaces, utensils and equipment used for other dishes.



Manage food allergens in your business

- Have a plan in place to cater for customers who phone ahead or ask at the counter whether a food is free of a particular food allergen, or whether the chef can accommodate their allergen-free requirements.
- Train your staff about allergies and the consequences of allergic reactions.
- Let them know what to do when a customer asks about allergens in food, and which staff members can give the customer the information they need.
- If serving a customer, have a clear system for front-of-house staff to mark an order to notify the chef and kitchen staff that a dish needs to be free of a particular food allergen(s).
- Have someone talk to the customer about the foods they can eat from the menu. The chef or the person preparing food should know your menu and what food allergens could be present.
- Check the ingredients before you start preparing food for someone with an allergy. Recipes can change even in regularly-purchased foods. If ingredients do change, tell staff and make sure your written records are up-to-date.
- Consider providing an allergy friendly menu and labelling the foods known to be free from certain food allergens.

TOP TIP: REMEMBER

- Oil used for frying (or curing the pan) might contain food allergens.
- Check the ingredient list of pre-prepared ingredients such as thickeners, stocks and dressings.
- Foods containing allergens are not always obvious. For example, praline and nougat contain nuts, and hummus usually contains tahini, which is made from sesame seeds.
- Check garnishes are safe to use.
- Make sure whoever prepares food understands there may be other names associated with food allergens, such as milk products labelled as whey.
- You can't simply take out the pieces of food allergen in the food that you can see – traces can still remain.