

# A Guide to Food Allergy for Caterers



Advice provided by [allergyuk.org](http://allergyuk.org)

Allergic reactions can be life-threatening and must be taken very seriously by those working in the catering industry. The most common dietary cause of severe reactions are peanuts, tree nuts (e.g. walnut, almond, hazelnut, brazil, pistachio, cashew, macadamia and pecan) egg and shellfish. However, any food has the potential to cause a severe reaction – not just nuts.

Eating out Can Be a Risk for someone with a Food Allergy  
Eating food prepared by others always carries an element of risk for someone with a food allergy. In December 2014, new regulations came into place. These are known as the European Food Information to Consumers Regulation No 1169/2011 (FIC). These regulations are a legal requirement and provide a framework for catering outlets to abide by, to ensure that information on all of the top 14 allergens is available to customers with a food allergy.

## > The top 14 Allergens

1. Eggs
2. Sesame
3. Milk
4. Tree nuts
5. Peanuts
6. Fish\*
7. Crustaceans a type of shell fish (for example prawn)\*
8. Soya
9. Gluten containing grains

10. Molluscs a type of shellfish (for example Mussels)\*

11. Lupin
12. Mustard
13. Celery
14. Sulphites

\* For further information on Fish and Shellfish categories see Allergy UK's factsheet on Fish and Shellfish Allergy which can be found at [www.allergyuk.org](http://www.allergyuk.org)

Any customers with a food allergy, or their family/carers, should ideally notify you of any allergies, either when booking, or immediately on arrival. By communicating clearly with you or your staff, risk can be minimised and the customer is able to make an informed decision as to what dishes would be suitable for them.

## > What can caterers do?

Catering businesses are now legally required to comply with the FIC Regulations which means that allergen information must be available upon request. The following provides some guidelines for caterers:



For more help, contact the Allergy UK helpline:  
9am to 5pm,  
Monday to Friday  
01322 619 898

## Top Tips

> Communication with staff needs to be clear

> Ensure suppliers provide accurate written details about all ingredients

> Give the customer the reassurance that you are taking their allergy seriously



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- Have allergen management procedures in place from back to front of house. This includes: storage, preparation and service areas
  - Do not offer to cater for the customer if you are unable to do so safely
  - Keep training up to date. There are a number of allergy courses and accreditations available and managers should keep records of staff training
  - Ensure suppliers provide accurate written details about all ingredients
  - If you have a contract in place with suppliers, include a clause that states you must be updated on any ingredient changes to any of the products supplied
  - If you do not have a contract in place, then it is your responsibility to check every label on every item that is supplied. Keep any contact with suppliers on record
  - Avoid the indiscriminate use of allergens as garnishes e.g. nuts or cheese, unless this is an essential part of the recipe
  - If a dish is meant to contain nuts, why not make sure this is reflected in the name: e.g. nut and carrot salad
  - Loose foods must also be labelled with allergen information, this includes buffets, deli counters, self-serve etc.
  - If possible, have a separate designated area to prepare allergen free dishes when requested by customers. Make sure that every member of staff is aware of this
  - In-line with the FICs, the opportunity for customers to request allergen information must be obvious – a sign in the premises should be clear and visible e.g. note on chalk board, printed sign on menus etc
  - Good communication and forward planning is key – explain any menu changes to your staff
  - Give the customer the reassurance that you are taking their allergy seriously
  - The regulations apply to food and drink. If someone orders a coffee for example, and has already informed you that they have a milk allergy, the customer will feel reassured that you have understood their needs if you remember not to include milk or a biscuit on the side. Check with your manager if you offer a milk alternative
  - Any staff trained in First Aid should make a point of learning what to do if someone suffers from a severe life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis
  - Communication with staff needs to be clear and a good understanding of the issues by the person preparing food is essential. The following link provides further information from the The Food Standards Agency
- **Guidance for front of house staff**
- When seating a table, it is good practice to ask if anyone has any food allergies alongside any dietary requirements. This will show that you take food allergy seriously



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- If a customer explains that they have a food allergy, listen to them carefully and if necessary, (or if it is your company policy) let them speak directly to the chef or a senior member of staff
- Make sure you know where your allergen information is kept, this may be in the form of an allergen matrix, product book etc. This is a legal requirement and it is not acceptable to say "I don't know" when asked for information about allergens
- If there is any doubt about whether a food is free from of a certain ingredient, admit to the customer that you are unsure but assure them that you will find out
- Make sure that the customer's allergy is noted clearly on their order
- If a customer receives their meal and finds a garnish to which they are allergic, you must not just remove the garnish and return the dish to customer. Tiny traces that remain after the garnish has been removed may be enough to cause a severe reaction. A new meal without the garnish must be prepared and served
- This may seem obvious but ensure that you serve the right dish to the right customer and double check
- ANY oil that has previously been used to cook products containing nuts/egg/fish etc. may contain traces of these foods so they should not be used to cook for anyone who is allergic to these foods
- If you are preparing food for someone with a food allergy, be aware of transferring traces of food from one plate to another or using the same spoons etc. This could cause cross-contamination, which could put someone with a food allergy at risk of a severe reaction
- Utensils, cutlery and work surfaces should be washed scrupulously after preparing foods containing allergens – they should even be washed thoroughly before they are put in a dishwasher if they are sticky e.g. peanut butter, mayonnaise, chocolate sauce etc.
- Separate utensils should be used for food containing allergens
- Handwashing is paramount, preventing cross contamination of allergens

## > Emergency action

If a customer with a food allergy becomes ill, it is likely that person – or someone with them – will state that he/she is suffering an allergic reaction. They may use the word

"ANAPHYLAXIS"

## > Specific points for A&L staff

- Cooking in unrefined oils e.g. groundnut oil (peanut oil) or sesame oil may leave traces of nut protein in food



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## > What is anaphylaxis?

Anaphylaxis is the most severe form of an allergic reaction and is life-threatening. Anaphylaxis is a medical emergency and requires immediate treatment. Symptoms include life-threatening airway and/or breathing difficulty; blood pressure can drop rapidly causing dizziness/fainting. There is usually swelling and a red raised itchy rash that can develop at the same time, or after the other symptoms. The whole body is affected, usually within minutes of exposure to the allergen, but occasionally symptoms can be delayed. It may be that the person initially vomits and feels unwell, so they must not be left alone as the symptoms described above can develop quickly and severe reactions can happen within minutes. Prompt action will be vital.

Adrenaline is a lifesaving medication and must be used promptly in anaphylaxis. Delaying the giving of adrenaline can result in deterioration and death. This is why using an adrenaline device is the first line treatment for anaphylaxis. **ADRENALINE MUST BE GIVEN FIRST** and then call 999. If a family member/carer is present, then they may administer the adrenaline while a member of staff calls 999.

## > Adrenaline Auto-Injectors

Adrenaline auto-injector devices (or 'adrenaline pens') are prescribed to people with allergies who are at risk of having a severe allergic reaction (known as 'anaphylaxis'). There are different types of adrenaline auto-injectors available in the UK. All deliver 'adrenaline' (also referred to as 'epinephrine'). All types are prescription only medicines, and need to be prescribed by a GP or Allergy specialist. The dose of adrenaline required

is dependent on the age and weight of the person requiring the adrenaline auto injector device, and will be prescribed by the doctor. Each adrenaline auto injector device will differ in appearance and the availability of the dose/strength available in that particular brand. In an emergency

1. Make sure that someone stays with the person all the time and call for assistance if needed
2. Lay person flat (if breathing is difficult, allow them to sit but do not let them stand or walk)
3. Use the adrenaline auto-injector device, if they have one
4. Call an ambulance (999) – use a mobile phone if available and state "anaphylaxis"

Someone should be sent to the entrance of your site to direct the ambulance team. More information about how to use an adrenaline auto-injector can be found in the Anaphylaxis and Severe Allergic Reactions factsheet which is available to download from the Allergy UK website.

## > Other resources

The Food Standards Agency offers free online allergy training and downloadable resources which you may find useful.

Allergy UK offers a catering accreditation – The Allergy Aware Scheme, which recognises catering outlets operating best practice when it comes to allergen management for their customers. This is based on a rigorous accreditation process which, if successful, means that a catering establishment can display the Allergy Aware Scheme logo as a signpost for customers with allergy.



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