

Safely Dining Out with Food Allergies

Be mindful of your food allergy when you go out to eat at a restaurant. You could be exposed to foods you are allergic to through cross-contact. This happens when your safe food comes into contact with your allergen food. Follow these tips to help avoid food that you are allergic to at restaurants.



Pick an allergy-safe restaurant.

1. **Ask your allergy doctor and others you know with food allergies about where to go.**
2. **Consider chain restaurants.** They have many locations, and often use the same menu with the same ingredients prepared the same way. Also, many of them train staff to make food for diners with food allergies.
3. **AVOID restaurants with a high risk for allergen exposure, such as:**
 - X Buffets where many are foods close to each other.** This increases the risk for cross-contact.
 - X Bakeries since many items contain common allergens and are not wrapped separately.** This allows allergens to come into contact with other foods.
 - X Restaurants that serve pre-made foods.** The staff may not know all the ingredients in the food and may not be able to adjust the recipe to avoid allergens.
 - X Restaurants that use allergens in most of their foods.** For example, if you are allergic to fish or shellfish, you may want to avoid seafood restaurants.

Prepare before you go to the restaurant.

- **Check restaurant menus before you go.**
- **Call ahead to talk to the manager.** Find tips and questions to ask when you call restaurants at: foodallergy.org/resources/calling-restaurants. Pick a day and time when the restaurant is not busy.
- **If possible, plan for an early meal.** The best time is either during the first hour the restaurant is open or the first hour they are serving dinner. The staff is alert, and the kitchen is cleaner.



“I always call a new restaurant before we go. It’s so important to know if they can accommodate my family’s food allergies.”

- **Get chef cards.** These are wallet-sized cards that list your food allergies for restaurant staff. They also give instructions on how to prepare your food to avoid cross-contact. You can make your own or download a template at: foodallergy.org/resources/food-allergy-chef-cards.



- **Pack any medicines you may need if you have a reaction.** You should always carry two epinephrine auto-injectors (such as EpiPen® or Auvi-Q®).

Tell restaurant staff what you need so you can eat safely.

- **Talk to restaurant staff about your food allergy.**
 - Ask the food server for food options that meet your needs.
 - Ask your server what is in your food and how it is prepared.
 - Explain to the manager and kitchen staff that they must avoid cross-contact.
- **Give your server your chef card and ask that they give it to the cook.**
- **Reward great service.** If you have a good experience, thank the staff and let them know you plan to visit again.
- **When you order food:**
 - Choose simple foods with nothing added to them (such as baked potatoes, broiled chicken, or steamed vegetables)
 - Avoid grilled and fried foods unless you can confirm that your allergen food is not cooked on the same grill or fryer.
 - Be careful when you order desserts. Restaurant staff may not know the ingredients if they are not made by the restaurant. And they may have allergens without you knowing it.

If the restaurant staff do not understand your food allergy, you may choose not to eat there.

Find more information on living safely with food allergies at FoodAllergy.org.

Remember, you are your best advocate!