



Creating a Food Allergy Safety Zone at Home



Understanding Safe Food Preparation

Cooking for family is a daily event most of us enjoy. But when you add a family member with food allergies, it becomes more challenging. As one who has been cooking for those with food allergies for many years, I have first-hand knowledge of how to overcome this challenge.



There are certain steps that need to be taken to ensure your family's safety, such as reading food labels, preparing food in a safe environment, preparing food with separate utensils and equipment, and keeping food safe until served.

If this can be done for hundreds of guests, I am confident you can do it for your family. Meals may take a little longer to prepare, but enjoying a safe dinner together as a family is well worth it.

Happy Cooking,
Chef Joel J. Schaefer, CCC

About Joel Schaefer, CCC, CHT

Joel Schaefer is a certified chef de cuisine with the American Culinary Federation and a certified hospitality trainer with the American Hotel and Lodging Association. He is the author of "Serving People with Food Allergies: Kitchen Management and Menu Creation." He is also a consultant for FARE, working with the organization to provide quality training material for its food allergy dining programs. Schaefer also worked as a subject matter expert on the ServSafe Allergens™ program for the National Restaurant Association. His past experience includes manager of product development and special diets for Walt Disney World® Resort, culinary nutrition instructor at Valencia Community College in Orlando, FL, and chef instructor at Kapiolani Community College in Honolulu, HI. He has experience in culinary education, training, product development, food allergies, special diets, and culinary demonstration. In his free time, he works to develop recipes that meet the dietary requirements for people with food allergies, celiac disease and other health-related issues.



What is a Food Allergy Safety Zone?

This booklet describes the proper way to:

1. wash, rinse and sanitize kitchen surfaces, tools and equipment,
2. store, prepare and cook food at home.

By following these steps, you will be able to create a “food allergy safety zone” at home. This will provide peace of mind and help your family enjoy safe meals together.





Dos and Don'ts for Food Allergy Safety

Kitchen Dos	Kitchen Don'ts
Do keep a designated area to store special products and equipment.	Don't place allergen-free food directly on shared equipment, such as an outdoor grill.
Do use only thoroughly cleaned cutting boards, pots, pans and utensils. Consider buying separate pans and utensils with colored handles to help family members identify them.	Don't use utensils that have just been used to prepare allergen-containing foods, or that haven't been properly cleaned, to prepare food for individuals with food allergies.
Do wash your hands before preparing food for a person with food allergies.	Don't use processed foods or foods that have been marinated unless you verify the ingredients.
Do use fresh ingredients and cooking oils.	Don't use foods that contain ingredients that you don't know or can't confirm.
Do designate special plates, either by shape or color, to help identify allergen-free meals.	Don't place safe meals in the same area as meals that may contain allergens.



Tips for Keeping Safe at Home

- Learn how to read food labels, and make sure everyone in your family can, too. Keep FARE’s “How to Read a Label” fact sheet pinned to your refrigerator or pantry door.
- All family members should wash their hands before and after eating to avoid the transfer of food allergens.
- Consider separating safe and unsafe food by designating specific shelves in the pantry and refrigerator and storing all foods in sealed containers.
- Label either the problem foods or the safe ones—whichever is easier. Color-coded stickers can be helpful in differentiating between safe and unsafe foods.
- Consider creating allergen-free zones in your home, or restrict eating to the kitchen and dining room only.
- Some allergens may become airborne during cooking (e.g., when boiling milk, frying fish or eggs) or food preparation (e.g., powdered milk, wheat flour). Family members with food allergies may need to avoid being near the allergens during cooking and meal preparation.
- For young children, fixed seating arrangements at the table may be helpful. This will discourage younger siblings from sharing their food or accidentally eating or drinking something that is safe for their sibling, but not for them.
- Stock up on essentials and keep safe substitutes on hand.
- Assemble an emergency kit with your medications, including your prescribed epinephrine auto-injector, and your Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Emergency Care Plan. It can be helpful to make two kits—one that stays home in a convenient, safe place that everyone knows, and another for travel.



Avoiding Cross-contact

Cross-contact happens when an allergen comes into contact with an otherwise safe food. This leaves traces of allergen in that safe food.

Even a tiny amount of food protein can cause life-threatening reactions in people with food allergies! The term “cross-contact” is fairly new. Some people may call this “cross-contamination,” but it is important to use the correct term—cross-contact—when talking about allergens.

Examples of Direct and Indirect Contact— Avoid Both!

Direct Cross-contact (allergen was directly applied and then removed)	Indirect Cross-contact (allergen was not directly applied)
Peeling cheese off a cheeseburger to make it a hamburger	Using the same spatula that flipped a piece of fish to flip a hamburger
Removing shrimp from a salad	Not washing hands after handling shrimp before making the next salad
Scraping peanut butter off a piece of bread and using the bread to make a different sandwich	Wiping off—rather than properly cleaning—a knife used to spread peanut butter before using it to spread jelly
Allowing splatter from an allergen-containing food to splash into an otherwise safe soup	Using the same spoon to stir a safe soup that was used in an allergen-containing soup



Kitchen Preparation Steps

Step One: Avoiding Cross-contact



- Thoroughly clean counters, cutting boards, knives, slicers, spoons, measuring cups, mixing bowls and other food prep equipment before preparing a meal for someone with food allergies.
- Keep separate sets of utensils for handling safe and unsafe foods. Some families use separate dishes, usually designated by different colors.



Step Two: Wash, Rinse, Sanitize

- **Wash:** Prepare a solution of warm, soapy water and use it with a single-use towel to clean all kitchen surfaces.
- **Rinse:** Fill a spray bottle with fresh water. Spray areas that have been cleaned with soapy water. Wipe down with a clean single-use towel.
- **Sanitize:** Use single-use, sanitized towels or wipes to clean all kitchen surfaces. Allow surfaces to air dry.



Step 3: Prepare Ingredients Safely

- Wash hands properly and use non-latex gloves to handle safe foods.
- Use designated tools and equipment to prepare safe foods.
- Prepare safe meals before other family meals.
- Serve safe foods separately, or cover and keep warm in an oven on low heat until served.



Preparing Your Family

Should You Remove Allergens from Your Home?

Some families decide to allow problem foods in their home, but take precautions to keep family members with food allergies safe. Others find it easier to remove the problem foods entirely. To decide which approach works best for your household, it's important to take a look at your family's needs and lifestyle:

- What has your experience been with reactions and accidental exposure?
- If you were to remove problem foods, how difficult would this be for other family members?
- How many children are at home? If a child has food allergies, how old are they, and how much responsibility do they normally take for managing the food they eat?
- How will the decision affect the overall quality of your home life?
- If you decide it is best to eliminate allergen-containing foods at home, how will you help your child with food allergies learn how to manage outside the home when contact with allergens is possible?
- If you decide not to eliminate allergen-containing foods at home, how will you teach your child with food allergies about which foods are safe and unsafe?



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