



Traveling to the UK With Food Allergies

Food allergies don't have to stop you from traveling. Whether traveling for business or pleasure, careful preparation and communication will help make your trip safe and enjoyable. This guide provides some helpful tips for traveling to the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland) as well as information on understanding food labels and dining out at restaurants.

Medication

Bring a kit with all your medications, including extra adrenaline (epinephrine) auto-injectors. Anaphylaxis Campaign also recommends carrying an emergency action plan that outlines recommended treatment in case of an allergic reaction, is signed by a doctor and includes emergency contact information. You can download the British Society for Allergy & Clinical Immunology's (BSACI's) emergency action plans at anaphylaxis.org.uk/schools/care-plans/bsacis-allergy-action-plans. These were produced in conjunction with Anaphylaxis Campaign. Be sure to bring extra copies with you and keep your plan in a place where others can find it. It is important that you and your travel companions understand what to do in case of an emergency.

Ask your doctor to write prescriptions that you can carry with you. Adrenaline auto-injectors available in the UK are Emerade®, EpiPen® and Jext®.

Understand policies for carrying medication on board the aircraft. You are allowed to bring your adrenaline into the aircraft cabin. However, you may need to show the printed label that identifies the medication. It is recommended that you also show the prescription label from the pharmacy and a note from your doctor that confirms your allergy. Check the security restrictions for the airport you are flying from for further information. Always carry your prescription with you.

Emergencies

ADMINISTER EPINEPHRINE AND DIAL 9-9-9

Always keep your adrenaline with you so it's easily accessible in the event of an emergency. Let your travel companions know about your allergies so they know what to do in case of an emergency and where your auto-injectors are located.

In the event of an emergency, administer adrenaline immediately. It is critical not to delay administering adrenaline. Next, dial **9-9-9** to contact emergency services for an ambulance. State that the patient is suffering from **anaphylaxis**. Read more about what to do in an emergency at anaphylaxis.org.uk/what-to-do-in-an-emergency. All paramedics and most ambulance technicians are trained in how to use adrenaline auto-injectors. Be sure to inform the emergency operator that adrenaline may be needed so they can ensure it is available. It is important to remain at the hospital for at least four hours of observation because symptoms may return.

Familiarize yourself with the local emergency services phone number and dialing procedures. For example, some hotels may have specific procedures for dialing 9-9-9 from your room. Be aware of your location so that you can give the operator specific information. Also, familiarize yourself with where the nearest accident and emergency (A&E) department is located. Details of local A&E services can be found at nhs.uk/Service-Search/Accident-and-emergency-services/LocationSearch/428.

In England, emergency treatment in an A&E department or a general practitioner's office (GP surgery) is free to all. However, if you require an extended stay or treatment in hospital, charges may apply. For further information, see nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/uk-visitors/visiting-england/Pages/visitors-from-outside-the-eea.aspx for visitors to England from outside the European Economic area (EEA) or nhs.uk/NHSEngland/AboutNHSservices/uk-visitors/visiting-england/Pages/visitors-from-the-eea.aspx for visitors from the EEA or Switzerland. People who live outside the EEA, including former UK residents, should make sure they are covered by personal health insurance, unless an exemption applies to them.

Understanding UK Food Labels

Reading food labels on packaged food is an important part of managing food allergies and avoiding your allergen. European food labelling laws (EU Food Information for Consumers Regulation No. 1169/2011) state that food companies must declare the presence of 14 major allergens when they, or products made from them (with some highly refined exceptions), appear in pre-packed food. The 14 listed allergens must be highlighted in the ingredients list (for example, in bold type).

- cereals containing gluten • crustaceans • eggs • fish • peanuts • soybeans •
- milk • nuts • celery • mustard • sesame • lupin • mollusks •
- sulphur dioxide or sulphites, where added and at a level above 10 mg/kg in the finished product •

In the UK the use of advisory labelling (i.e., precautionary statements such as "may contain," "processed in a facility that also processes," or "made on equipment with") is voluntary and optional for manufacturers.

There are no laws governing or requiring these statements, so they may or may not indicate if a product contains a specific allergen. However, most major food companies and supermarkets do use these voluntary warnings.



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Read more about these allergens at anaphylaxis.org.uk/what-is-anaphylaxis/the-14-major-allergens.

Snacks and Meals

It is recommended that you travel with non-perishable food that is safe for you to eat in case you are unable to find foods allergen-free while traveling. Good options include dried pasta and snack bars that are free of your allergen. If you plan on staying in a hotel, consider staying in one that has a small kitchen or a refrigerator and microwave to store and prepare safe meals and snacks. Carefully clean all utensils, equipment and surfaces before first use. You may be able to purchase some of the same products in the UK as you can back home, but remember that the same product manufactured in different countries may contain different ingredients.

Dining Out at Restaurants

In the UK, food businesses selling catered food (such as restaurants, takeaways and hotels) are required by law to provide information on major allergenic ingredients. This information can be provided in writing and/or orally. If information is provided orally, the food business will need to ensure that there is some sort of written signage that is clearly visible, to indicate that allergen information is available from a member of staff. Systems should also be in place to ensure that, if requested, the information given orally is supported in a recorded form (in writing, for example) to ensure consistency and accuracy.

When you are dining out with food allergies, planning ahead is important. Consider choosing chain restaurants. Each restaurant is likely to use the same ingredients and prepare foods the same way, and a growing number are allergy-aware. Before you go to the restaurant, there are some steps you can take to see if a particular restaurant is a good choice for you. Many restaurants have websites and post their menus online for you to review ahead of time. You can also call the restaurant and ask to speak to the chef or manager about your food allergies, menu items and meal preparation. We recommend calling during off-peak hours.

Communication between restaurants and customers with food allergies is essential to a safe dining experience. The restaurant manager and wait staff should know about your food allergy. Remind a manager or the head waiter about your allergies before you are seated. In addition to asking questions about the ingredients and preparation methods, carry a “chef card” that outlines the foods you must avoid. Present the card to the chef or manager for review. Download chef cards in English and 9 other languages at foodallergy.org/managing-food-allergies/dining-out. The UK’s Food Standard’s Agency (FSA) “think allergy” chef cards can be downloaded at food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/allergy-chef-cards.pdf.

When selecting your meal, keep it simple. If you have to ask complicated questions about the items on a menu, simple fare may be the safest. Be sure to ask what is in your dish and how it is prepared. It is important that the restaurant understands what you are allergic to and takes steps to avoid cross-contact. You may want to speak to the manager and the chef, just to be sure.

Remember, never be embarrassed if you feel you are not communicating effectively. If you think a member of the wait staff does not understand your situation, always trust your instincts and seek out another staff member or manager. Sometimes, the safest choice is to avoid eating, and find a safe meal somewhere else.



Sample Chef Card

Resources

Emergency allergy action plans:

anaphylaxis.org.uk/schools/care-plans/bsacis-allergy-action-plans

Adrenaline Auto-Injectors:

anaphylaxis.org.uk/living-with-anaphylaxis/strategies-for-living-with-allergy/care-and-medication/

Find an Accident and Emergency Service:

nhs.uk/Service-Search/Accident-and-emergency-services/LocationSearch/428

Eating out and shopping:

anaphylaxis.org.uk/living-with-anaphylaxis/strategies-for-living-with-allergy/eating-out-and-shopping/

Additional information:

anaphylaxis.org.uk