

Insider's Guide to Dining Out

When you arrive at the restaurant, check in with the host or hostess. Since you called ahead to let the restaurant know about yours or your child's allergy, ask if there is a notification of your allergy or special diet on your reservation. If there is, this is a good sign that your information was communicated to the restaurant team. If there is not, this should be the first 'red flag,' but do not be discouraged. Ask them to inform the manager that you have arrived, and you would like to talk to them when you are seated.

When you arrive at your table, check the cleanliness of the table and chairs. It is very important that your seating area is clean and sanitized, particularly if you have ever had a reaction from touching your allergen. If the server advises you that they are aware of your dietary request, let them know you would still like to speak with the manager or the chef on duty. You should always deal directly with a manager or chef to ensure the right information is getting to the kitchen.

When the manager arrives, show him or her the written menu option you discussed with the restaurant prior to your arrival (see the Calling the Restaurant section for more information). If the manager seems attentive and genuinely concerned, go over your request in detail with them. Ask if they can personally handle your food so that there are no mistakes. If they agree, you are on the right track.

Servers should not prepare any part of your meal. Server areas can be very busy with many servers working on a variety of orders at the same time. Ladles and tongs used for serving soups and salad ingredients can be inadvertently placed back with the wrong food. This will cause your meal to come in contact with other foods you may be allergic to.

When your meal is delivered, first, make sure the person who delivers your food is your server, a manager or the chef. If it

is someone you have not spoken with, this should be a red flag. Ask for a manager to double-check your order. This person may have picked up the wrong food.

Secondly, your plate should be delivered separately. Many restaurants teach the technique of "plate stacking," where the plates are balanced on the server's arm and delivered to the table. You do not want your plate next to another guest's plate that might contain an allergen.

Third, confirm your order with them. Have them describe how your meal was prepared and listen for anything unusual. Did they mention an ingredient or cooking technique that was not discussed earlier? Then look at the plate. Are there any garnishes? Is the item cooked correctly? If anything looks wrong, ask questions. You need to assess the situation and make the final decision. If anything is wrong and you feel uncomfortable, send the food back. Better safe than sorry!

If you do your research, talk to a chef or manager about your dietary request, communicate your needs with the staff at the restaurant, and review your meal before taking your first bite, you and your family will have a wonderful dining experience over and over again.

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