



Dining Out—Before You Go

When you are dining out with food allergies, planning ahead is important. Follow these tips on what to do before you go out to have a better dining experience.

Restaurant Selection

- Ask around. Your allergist and others who manage food allergies may have recommendations. To see if a particular restaurant may be a good choice, check out the website and review the menu in advance. FARE's restaurant database is available at www.safefare.org.
- Pick a restaurant that best fits what you can eat. It is best to avoid riskier choices, which could include:
 - Buffets: With a wide variety of foods so close to one another, the risk for accidental exposure and cross-contact is high.
 - Bakeries: There is a high risk of cross-contact, since many items are made with some of the top 8 allergens and many are not packaged.
 - Restaurants that serve pre-made foods: The staff may not have an accurate list of the ingredients in a pre-made item. Since the dishes are not prepared from scratch, you can't ask the chef to remove the problem ingredient.
 - Restaurants that are known to use allergens in many dishes. For instance, peanuts and other nuts are used frequently in Asian cuisines. In ice cream parlors, shared scoops increase the risk of cross-contact. If you have a fish or shellfish allergy, it's a good idea to avoid seafood restaurants.
 - If you plan to attend a catered event where the food will be prepared in advance, ask if it's possible to provide an allergy-friendly option.

- Consider chain restaurants, especially when traveling. Each restaurant is likely to use the same ingredients and prepare foods the same way, and a growing number are allergy-aware.

Prepare for Your Dining Out Experience

- Call ahead and ask to speak to a manager. Chef Joel Schaefer has tips and sample questions for calling restaurants, available on our website.
- Timing is everything. Choose a day and time when restaurant kitchens are not as busy. The best time to dine at any restaurant is during the first hour of a service period. The staff is more alert and attentive, and the kitchen is much cleaner. If possible, plan for an early meal.
- Bring a chef card. This wallet-sized card lists your food allergies and states that your food must be cooked in a clean and safe area to avoid cross-contact. You can find online sources for cards in multiple languages, make your own, or download a template on our website.
- Be prepared. No matter how carefully you've planned or how safe you feel at a particular restaurant, never leave home without your epinephrine auto-injector and any additional medications, and be sure to wear your medical identification (e.g., bracelet, other jewelry).

