



## Dining Out—Calling the Restaurant

When calling a restaurant, call between meal periods. Do not call during peak breakfast, lunch or dinner hours. The best time to call is between 2:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. Most restaurants are not as busy during these hours and you can spend time talking with a manager or chef. If a manager or chef is not available, ask for the manager or chef's name and the best time to call back. Be ready with your list of questions.

Here are suggested questions to ask once you have informed them you or your child have a food allergy:

*Are you willing to try to serve me in your restaurant?*

If they say yes, then provide them with as much information about your food allergies or special diets. Make sure they understand how serious an allergic reaction can be.

*How often do you train your staff on food allergies?*

This is important because there is constant employee turnover in the food service industry. You do not want a new employee handling your dietary request that has not been trained properly.

*Do you have a separate area to prepare foods for special diets?*

If the answer is yes, ask what foods are prepared in this area. There may be hidden allergens used in this area.

*Do you have separate cutting boards and utensils to prepare my meal on?*

Several companies make color-coded tools for safe food preparation for people with food allergies. If they have these tools, it is a sign that the restaurant has a special understanding of food allergen safety procedures.

*Will you be at the restaurant while I am there?*

If not, ask for the name of the manager or staff member who is aware of the circumstances.

*Do you have any specialty products for people with food allergies?*

If they carry prepared mixes, rice milk, or packaged snacks or desserts that are from trusted manufacturers, this restaurant is demonstrating awareness about food allergies and planning for guests who have these needs.

*Will I be able to look at ingredient labels?*

If they are willing to show you ingredient labels, this is a good sign that this restaurant is going to be accommodating. Remember, you are the expert on your food allergy, not the restaurant staff.

## Discussing the Menu

After providing the manager or chef with the list of your food allergies, advise them of what you usually eat when dining out. With this information, the chef should be able to create a menu item that will fit your needs.

Next, discuss cooking preparation. Sautéed or baked items will minimize the use of common cooking equipment and shared utensils. Go through the list of ingredients being used in your dish, including garnishes, to ensure there are no hidden allergens. Once you have both agreed on your meal, write it down and take this information with you to the restaurant when you dine. Inform the manager or chef when you plan on dining to see if he or she will be there to oversee your meal.

