



Taking Your Food Allergies Out to Dinner

Restaurants serve more than just food. They also serve an important role in our social activities. According to the National Restaurant Association (NRA), 44% of adults report that restaurants are an essential part of their lifestyle. However, if you or someone in your family has a food allergy, eating out can be a stressful experience.

Communication is key

Food allergy awareness is important for owners, food preparers and wait staff in all types of eating establishments--from sit down to take out. Additionally, it is imperative for you to alert servers and managers of your food allergies prior to ordering. If you or a family member has a food allergy, consider checking a restaurant's menu online or calling before visiting. Always alert your server or the manager about your allergy. Simple dishes made from scratch are safest. Remember to carry emergency medicine at all times, especially when dining out. And, if there is any question that an allergen-free meal cannot be safely served, then it is best to avoid the risk and politely leave.

New legislation for food allergies

Food allergy advocates have been encouraging legislation directed at restaurants and other eating establishments for years. Yet, until recently there has been no requirement for food allergy education in the United States.

That is changing. In February 2011, The Food Allergy Awareness Act will be put into play in over 14,000 Massachusetts eating establishments. They will be required to implement a new set of regulations designed to increase food allergy awareness in restaurants. The new regulations will require 1) menus to remind patrons to alert their server of their allergy, 2) food allergy awareness posters posted in clear view of all staff, and 3) at least one food protection manager to view a food allergy education video. Additionally, states like New York, Minnesota and Pennsylvania are reviewing initiatives to increase food allergy awareness in food establishments.

By increasing basic awareness and encouraging effective communication, some reactions may be prevented and eating out will hopefully become less stressful for those with food allergies.

Did You Know?

According to NRA Top Ten Facts in 2010, www.restaurant.org, 29% of adults surveyed say that

purchasing take-out food is essential to the way they live.

1. It is estimated that the number of cases of anaphylaxis from foods in the United States increased from 21,000 per year in 1999 to 51,000 per year in 2008.
2. From 2003 to 2006, food allergies resulted in approximately 317,000 visits to hospital emergency departments, outpatient clinics and physicians' offices.

To The Point

Speak up if you have food allergies and order wisely. If communicating with restaurant personnel is difficult or if it appears they don't understand your food allergy, then consider finding another place to dine. Your enjoyment and your health depend on it.