

Food allergy and intolerance

14 allergens

In the UK, food businesses must tell you if they use any of the 14 key allergens as ingredients in the food and drink they provide.

Food businesses include restaurants, cafés and takeaways, and businesses that produce, manufacture or pre-pack food.

The 14 allergens that they need to declare are:

- celery
- cereals containing gluten – including wheat, rye, barley and oats
- crustaceans – such as prawns, crabs and lobsters
- eggs
- fish
- lupin
- milk
- molluscs – such as mussels and oysters
- mustard
- tree nuts – including almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, brazil nuts, cashews, pecans, pistachios and macadamia nuts
- peanuts
- sesame seeds
- soybeans
- sulphur dioxide and sulphites (if they are at a concentration of more than ten parts per million)

Pre-packed food

The 14 allergens must be emphasised within the ingredients list of pre-packed food or drink. This can be done, for example, using bold, italic or coloured type, to make the ingredients easier to spot.

Eating out

If you eat out or order a takeaway meal, the food business must provide allergen information in writing. This could be full allergen information on a menu or a written signpost explaining how you can obtain this information, for example by

speaking to a member of staff.

You can [report businesses that are not meeting the legal requirements](#) and/or illness using our online service.

May contain labelling

Phrases such as 'may contain' warn customers that there could be small amounts of an allergen in a food product. This can happen when the allergen has entered the product accidentally during the production process.

There is no specific legal requirement to label food with 'may contain'. However, food must be safe to eat and information to help people with allergies make safe choices, and manage their condition effectively, must be provided.

Manufacturers can also choose to use different phrases to warn of the risk of allergen cross-contamination such as:

- May contain x
- Not suitable for those with 'x' allergy

This is known as precautionary allergen labelling. Where you see precautionary allergen labelling, there is a risk of the unintentional presence of allergen in the food. If you have an allergy, you should not eat food with this labelling.

Quick guide to ordering food or a takeaway safely

If you have a food allergy or intolerance, it's important that you have all the information you need to make a safe food choice. We've listed some things you should think about before ordering a meal.

Eating out at a restaurant, café or food outlet

When you plan to eat out

- Check the menu online and call ahead to ask what the business's policy is on food allergy and intolerance. Does it offer food that is suitable for you? And if not, are the staff able to make a special meal for you? (Food businesses must offer you allergen information, but are not required to offer you a different meal to suit your need.)
- Be very clear about your allergy/intolerance and give examples of the foods that make you ill.
- If you don't feel the person you're speaking to understands your needs, ask for the manager or someone who can help better.
- Ask how the food is handled and cooked, and whether there is a chance of cross-contamination from cooking equipment or ingredients.
- Check allergen information is accurate. Has there been a last-minute recipe change or ingredient substitution?
- Be extra careful if the restaurant serves complex dishes, as allergens could be less obvious or hidden.
- If you have any doubt about the staff understanding the importance of your dietary needs, do not book the restaurant.

On arrival

- Speak to your server or the manager. Be clear about your food allergy/intolerance and confirm your previous conversation with the staff
- Check the meal choices are suitable for you or that they can make changes to suit your dietary needs.
- Remind them to be careful of cross-contamination or added allergens from glazes, sauces, cooking oils, and to handle your meal with care.
- If you have any doubt about the staff understanding the importance of your dietary needs, do not eat there.

Ordering a takeaway over the phone or online

Takeaway meals are considered to be 'distance selling', so information must be made available at the point of purchase and point of delivery.

Follow the steps listed in the 'Eating out at a restaurant, café or food outlet' section, but also:

- check that the allergen information is available on the menu, online or over the telephone
- when ordering for several people, make sure the restaurant labels your meal, so you know which order is safe for you

Planning an allergy friendly meal at home

Cooking for someone with food allergies and intolerances can be worrying if you're not used to doing it. Plan a safe and enjoyable meal by:

- asking your guest (or their parents or carers, if you're cooking for a child) what they can and can't eat
- making sure you keep allergens separate from other foods
- double-checking the ingredients lists on pre-packed foods for allergens
- avoiding adding toppings or decorations to dishes which might otherwise appear safe

There are often good substitutes for allergens available in food shops – don't hesitate to ask your guest (or parents/carers) for help and suggestions.

Clean work surfaces and equipment thoroughly to remove traces of anything you might have cooked before, to avoid cross contamination.

If someone is allergic to something, and you have served them a food they can't eat, simply taking it off their plate isn't enough. Even a tiny trace can be enough to cause an allergic reaction.

Helping to keep you safe

Free allergy alerts

It's important that you can trust the food you are buying. So we work closely with local authorities, the food industry and consumer organisations to make you are aware of missing or wrong allergen information on packaged food products. You can [sign up to receive a free email or text message](#) each time we issue an allergy alert about a food product. This will include information about what to do if you have bought it.

Researching and monitoring risks

The [Food Allergy and Intolerance Research Programme](#) identifies risk factors associated with food allergies. This programme exists so that we can provide you with the most useful and up-to-date information.

Allergic reaction

If you feel ill or have a reaction to your meal, make sure you seek medical help immediately.

NHS Choices has information on [what to do in the event of an allergic reaction](#).