

Preferences for consumers with food allergies or intolerances when eating out

Area of research interest: [Food hypersensitivity](#)

Study duration: 2014-03-01

Project code: FS305013

Conducted by: University of Bath

This included exploring the impact of the allergen labelling rules on consumers, and gathering evidence to inform advice on the provision of allergen information.

Background

The Food Information Regulations (FIR) came into effect on 13 December 2014. It requires food businesses to provide information on the presence of 14 allergens (cereals containing gluten, crustaceans, molluscs, eggs, fish, peanuts, nuts, soya, milk, celery, mustard, sesame, lupin, and sulphur dioxide at levels above 10mg/kg or 10 mg/litre) when used as deliberate ingredients in foods not prepacked. However, there is flexibility as to how this information is provided.

This study will help us and other relevant stakeholders understand the preferences and information seeking behaviours of those with food allergies and intolerances when eating out or buying foods not pre-packed, for example from a restaurant or a deli.

This will also inform our future work on educating food businesses on the importance of allergen management (highlighting how this can increase consumer confidence and how good allergen information is also good for business). We will also be continuing the work we are doing with allergy charities and consumer groups, to help those living with food allergy, to understand the importance of asking for allergen information when eating out.

Research Approach

The main aims of the research were:

- to understand the preferences of food allergic and intolerant consumers on the provision of 14 identified allergenic ingredients when buying and eating foods that are not pre-packed
- to understand the reported impact that providing information on these 14 allergenic ingredients for foods that are not pre-packed on the quality of life of the food allergic and intolerant consumer

The research was split into two parts:

Part A (during 2014) This involved a 4-phase programme of qualitative and quantitative research before the implementation of the FIR allergen rules, which took effect in December 2014.

Phase 1: A scoping phase including a relevant literature review; the development of relevant quality of life measures for food intolerance; and a sampling strategy

Phase 2: In depth qualitative research consisting of 75 interviews and diaries with food allergic and intolerant individuals (including parents and carers) from across the UK to explore information seeking practices and preferences for foods not pre-packed

Phase 3: A national survey to characterise the prevalence of these preferences as well as establishing how they relate to measures of quality of life. This included a broad range of questions being asked to approximately 500 relevant individuals.

Phase 4: A consolidation of the findings including a workshop to establish the feasibility of food businesses incorporating these preferences into their information provision practices.

Part B (during 2016)

This assessed changes in consumer preferences and the quality of life of the allergic and intolerant consumer. It used relevant literature and replicated the methods used in Phases 2 and 3 above, to allow a comparison of results and outcomes before and after the implementation of the allergen rules.

Results

The findings included:

The research found that, post legislation:

- 70% of food allergic and intolerant consumers feel more confident in asking staff for allergen information
- 56% of food allergic and intolerant consumers value staff more as a source of information
- 44% of food allergic and intolerant consumers are more 'adventurous' about eating out
- 67% feel allergen information on food business websites is dependable 63% say talking to the chef about their allergen needs can be relied on
- 35% report an improvement in allergen information in the menu

Food allergic and intolerant customers also said that improved confidence in allergen information led them to eating out more frequently and that they were more likely to return to and recommend venues with staff that were helpful and attentive about their allergen needs.

Published Papers

2019

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Hamshaw, R. J. T., Barnett, J., Gavin, J., & Lucas, J. S. (2019). [Perceptions of food hypersensitivity expertise on social media: Qualitative study](#). Interactive Journal of Medical Research, 8(2), [e10812].

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Hamshaw, R. J. T., Barnett, J., & Lucas, J. S. (2018). [Tweeting and eating: The effect of links and likes on food hypersensitive consumers' perceptions of tweets](#). Frontiers in Public Health, 6, 1-12. [118].

Begen, F., Barnett, J., Payne, R., Gowland, M. H., DunnGalvin, A., & Lucas, J. S. (2018). [Eating out with a food allergy in the UK: Change in the eating out practices of consumers with food allergy following introduction of allergen information legislation](#). *Clinical and Experimental Allergy*, 43(3), 317–324.

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Begen, F., Barnett, J., & Roy, D. (2016). [Consumer preferences for written and oral information about allergens when eating out](#). *PLoS ONE*, 11(5), [e0156073].

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Barnett, J., Botting, N., Gowland, M. H., & Lucas, J. S. (2012). [The strategies that peanut and nut-allergic consumers employ to remain safe when travelling abroad](#). *Clinical and Translational Allergy*, 2(1), 12.

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Leftwich, J., Muncer, K., Shepherd, R., Raats, M. M., Barnett, J., Hazel Gowland, M., & Lucas, J. S. (2011). [The challenges for nut-allergic consumers of eating out](#). *Clinical and Experimental Allergy*, 41(2), 243-249.

Barnett, J., Muncer, K., Leftwich, J., Shepherd, R., Raats, M. M., Gowland, M. H., ... Lucas, J. S. (2011). [Using 'may contain' labelling to inform food choice: a qualitative study of nut allergic consumers](#). *BMC Public Health*, 11(1), 734.

Research report

England, Northern Ireland and Wales

PDF

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