

The Preferences of those with Food Allergies and/or Intolerances when Eating Out

Why did we carry out the research?

In December 2014 legislation was introduced requiring providers of non-prepacked foods to make information relating to the presence of (any of) 14 allergens in their foods available to consumers. Venues that need to provide this information include restaurants and take-aways; and other venues like street food stalls, delicatessens, bakeries, nurseries, schools and hospitals are also included.

We wanted to find out about:

- **Your** eating out experiences and preferences **before** and **after** the legislation (in 2014 and again in 2016).
- Any **changes** that you noticed in **allergen information provision** since the legislation.
- **How** this affected **your** eating out experiences.

Before and after the legislation you completed:

Interviews and eating out diaries

- **In 2014**, 75 of you completed interviews and 47 completed diaries
- **In 2016**, 56 returned to complete interviews and 26 completed diaries

OR Online surveys

- **In 2014**, 874 of you completed surveys
- **In 2016**, 188 returned to complete surveys
- **In 2016**, 204 new participants completed surveys



Peanuts



Nuts



Milk



Soya



Mustard



Lupin



Eggs



Fish



Molluscs



Crustaceans



Cereals containing gluten



Sesame seeds



Celery



Sulphur dioxide

What you told us about your eating out experiences in 2014

Clear and accurate written information about the allergen content of foods is very important to you.

- You **checked for information** online beforehand, and looked at main menus, separate allergen menus, and supplementary allergen folders within the venue.
- Where written information was clear, you tended to **trust the venue** more.
- Where written information was poor, you had to **restrict** your food choices, **go without** or take **risks** and hope that your meal was safe to eat.

'I'd do a little bit of planning in advance. I'd have a look on the internet to see what food places are around, and if there were one or two that caught my eye, I'd have one or two places I know that were safe to eat.' (Peanuts, Tree nuts)

'I think if it's written down, I'm more than likely to trust it... Whereas, if a staff member says "ugh, yeah, I think so..." I am very doubtful.' (Milk)

'The trust is in the staff to begin with. I mean, they're your first contact, aren't they? If they have knowledge of the food, then I'm quite confident. If they have no knowledge of the food, then I think I'm not coming here again.' (Milk)

'I've had them just shrug their shoulders and say "I don't know." "Well, does the chef know?" "I don't think he will," you know, sort of thing...and you're thinking, you're joking...!' (Gluten)

Asking staff about the allergen content of meals:

- You **valued staff** who were knowledgeable and understanding about your dietary needs, and about the allergen content of their foods.
- Many of you had experienced situations where staff had **little or no knowledge** and/or were unhelpful to you
- Some of you were **reluctant to ask** staff questions about the allergen content of foods because you were worried about being seen as 'making a fuss'.

What you told us about your eating out experiences in 2016

- You notice **better** written allergen information provision in many venues.
- Some staff are **more allergen-aware** and many are **more willing** to help you.
- Many of you are more **willing to ask** staff questions because of the legislation.

'I do feel like I have more information and I think people are more aware. I think that's probably the most useful thing... It's definitely better...'
(Tree nuts)

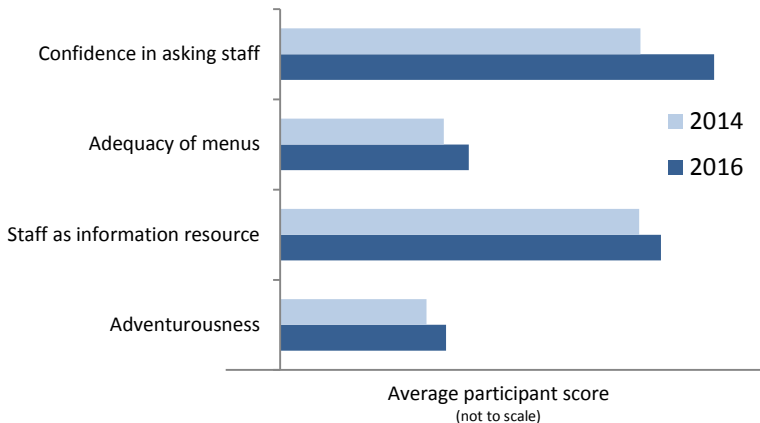
However:

- Some of you are worried about **cross-contamination**.
- Information provision about some allergens has **not improved**.
- You find the pace of change is **too slow**.
- You would like to see **consistent** information provision across **all venues**.

'I've got the "right to ask"'. (Eggs)

'18 months on and we've probably moved a little bit but you really would have hoped that it would have moved a lot more than this...' (Peanuts, Tree nuts)

Comparing survey responses between 2014 and 2016



- In 2016 there was **increased** 'confidence in asking staff', **improvement** in the 'adequacy of menus', **greater satisfaction** with 'staff as an information resource' and **increased** 'adventurousness' when eating out.

What recommendations did we make based on what you told us?

- Written information provided by the venue is generally likely to be **trusted** by consumers – it is therefore vital that it is **trustworthy**.
- Allergen information in the main menu should be **comprehensive** yet **simple and clear**. Separate menus relating to different allergens and allergen reference sources providing ingredients information are welcomed.

- A lack of questions about allergens **should not** be read as a lack of demand for, or interest in, information about allergens.
- When consumers ask staff questions about allergens, they take notice of more than the response given. The **care, interest and expertise** that staff demonstrate, is also taken into account.
- Venues can signal that staff are attentive to consumers' needs by taking a **proactive approach** e.g. serving staff can initiate enquiries about specific dietary requirements at the table.

Further information

Thank you for your valuable contributions to this research.



If you have any questions or require further information please contact Professor Julie Barnett: J.C.Barnett@bath.ac.uk

To download a copy of the full research report and associated papers please go to: <https://www.food.gov.uk/science/research/allergy-research/fs305013>

Other sources of useful information:



Food Standards Agency- <https://www.food.gov.uk/>



Anaphylaxis Campaign- <https://www.anaphylaxis.org.uk/>



Allergy UK- <https://www.allergyuk.org/>



Coeliac UK- <https://www.coeliac.org.uk/home/>



Allergy Action- <https://allergyaction.org/>