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  OR  Online surveys
• **In 2014**, 75 of you completed interviews and 47 completed diaries
• **In 2016**, 56 returned to complete interviews and 26 completed diaries
• **In 2014**, 874 of you completed surveys
• **In 2016**, 188 returned to complete surveys
• **In 2016**, 204 new participants completed surveys
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.

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.

**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**.

Comparing survey responses between 2014 and 2016

- **Confidence in asking staff**
- **Adequacy of menus**
- **Staff as information resource**
- **Adventurousness**

Average participant score (not to scale)

- **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/