



Food allergies are an increasing fact of life that must be addressed with a professional food safety strategy. The law requires it and the public expects it.

This guide is intended to provide valuable information to the food service industry in relation to adhering to best practice concerning protecting consumers from the allergens which may cause them harm. Once a food service outlet has been advised of a patron's allergens, there is no acceptable excuse if that patron has a reaction to that allergen. The keys to avoiding allergic reactions are comprehensive staff training and clear and concise labelling. This guide focuses on these elements.

Allergy or Intolerance?

Food allergies create adverse immune system responses to specific proteins. The most severe, and perhaps most commonly known, is anaphylaxis which leaves victims gasping for breath and can cause death.

By comparison, a food intolerance does not involve the immune system. Food intolerances occur when the gut is unable to digest certain foods and these can cause discomfort without being life threatening.

Symptoms of Allergic Reactions

The effects of allergic reactions range from mild to extreme. Deaths have occurred. More common reactions include –

- · Swelling of the tongue and throat
- · Difficulty breathing
- Dizziness leading to collapse
- · Persistent cough
- · Hoarse voice
- Vomiting

- Wheezing
- Hives
- Facial swelling
- Tingling sensations around the lips and mouth

Quick Facts about Food Allergies



There is no cure for food allergies.



The only away to manage allergies is to avoid the allergen.



Most food allergy fatalities occur because of food eaten outside the home.



Even small traces of allergens can cause severe reactions.

Common Allergens Must be Clearly Labelled

The following ingredients are recognised by Food Standards Australia as being high risk allergens. In every professional kitchen, they must be clearly labelled and staff must be trained in how to prepare them safely.

Peanuts
Sesame Seeds

Tree Nuts
Shellfish

• Eggs • Lupin

· Dairy · Soy

• Fish • Wheat

The Dangers of Cross-Contamination

To avoid inadvertently allowing traces of allergens to be transferred from one food preparation area to another, an effective prevention strategy must be implemented. This does not involve reinventing the wheel. Kitchens effectively controlling this use colour-coded chopping boards and implements for various food types. Red for uncooked meats, green for vegetables, yellow for poultry etc. Strict adherence to this system will eliminate the likelihood of cross-contamination.

Staff Training

Trained staff will recognise potential food allergy hazards more readily than untrained staff. To ensure your food preparation establishment does not put consumers at risk and complies with the law –

- · Keep all ingredients clearly labelled,
- · Ensure staff know the common allergens,
- · Ensure staff know which prepared foods contain the common allergens,
- · Wash all containers between uses so allergens are removed,
- · Place food allergy charts around the food preparation area,
- · In the menu, request diners ask about the ingredients in all foods,
- · Develop systems so patrons with allergies are never compromised,
- · Require staff ask diners if they have food allergies,
- · Always be truthful when responding to customer inquiries,
- · Obtain a copy of suppliers' food allergy policies.





To ensure your professional kitchen maintains its reputation for quality, never falls foul of the law and protects public safety, create a schedule of staff training events to cover the contents of this guide as they apply to your specific workplace. Additionally, insist accurate labelling and safe kitchen practices become the backbone of your kitchen to improve staff morale, customer satisfaction and your bottom line.