

# Dining Out Safely with Food Allergies

Questions to Ask at Every Restaurant

**Asking questions isn't being difficult. It's being safe.**

## Dining Out with Confidence

Restaurant meals don't have to be stressful. With preparation and the right questions, you can enjoy dining out while keeping your family safe. This guide provides a framework for communicating effectively with restaurant staff.

### Before You Go

- **Research the restaurant online:** Check menus, allergen information, and reviews from other allergy families
- **Call ahead:** Speak with a manager about your allergies during non-peak hours
- **Choose restaurants wisely:** Avoid high-risk cuisines (e.g., Thai for peanut allergies, seafood restaurants for shellfish)
- **Download allergy cards:** Carry printed cards listing your allergens in the language of the cuisine
- **Eat at off-peak times:** Staff can give you more attention when less busy

### The 4 Essential Questions to Ask

Memorize these questions. Ask them every single time.

#### Question 1:

**"Does this dish contain [allergen]?"**

Be specific. Name your allergen clearly: peanuts, tree nuts, milk, eggs, wheat, soy, fish, shellfish, sesame. Don't assume the server knows what 'nut allergy' means — specify which nuts.

#### Question 2:

**"How is this food prepared?"**

Cross-contamination is the hidden danger. Ask about:

- Shared cooking surfaces (grills, fryers, pans)

- Shared utensils and cutting boards
- Shared oil (especially fryer oil)
- Pre-made sauces and marinades
- Whether dishes are prepared in a separate area

### Question 3:

**"Can you check the ingredient label?"**

Servers may not know every ingredient. Ask them to check labels or bring you the packaging. Hidden allergens appear in unexpected places: soy in bread, milk in 'dairy-free' items, wheat in sauces.

## Question 4:

**"Do you have an allergy-friendly menu or protocol?"**

Many restaurants now have formal allergy protocols. Ask if they:

- Have an allergen menu or chart
- Train staff on food allergies
- Use separate preparation areas for allergy orders
- Have a manager or chef who handles allergy requests

## Bonus Tip:

**"When possible, call the restaurant ahead of time."**

Calling 30-60 minutes before your visit allows the kitchen to prepare. Ask to speak with a manager or chef. Explain your allergies and ask what dishes they can safely prepare.

## At the Restaurant

- **Speak directly with your server** — Mention allergies immediately when ordering
- **Ask to speak with a manager or chef** if your server seems unsure
- **Be polite but firm** — Your safety is more important than being 'easy'
- **Don't rely on 'allergy-friendly' labels alone** — Still ask questions
- **When in doubt, don't eat it** — Trust your instincts
- **Keep emergency medication accessible** — Not in the car

## Red Flags to Watch For

Consider leaving or ordering only simple, safe items if:

- Staff seem dismissive or annoyed by allergy questions
- Server says 'I think it's safe' without checking
- Kitchen refuses to check ingredients

- Restaurant uses shared fryers for everything
- Staff are not familiar with common allergens

## Remember:

You are your best advocate. Asking questions isn't being difficult — it's being safe. Most restaurants want to accommodate you; they just need clear communication.

**What if you didn't have to ask these questions every single time?  
Ask us about OIT treatment: 262-657-9390**