

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**