

## Food Allergens

A **food allergen** is a protein in a food or ingredient that some people are sensitive to. These proteins occur naturally. When enough of an allergen is eaten, an allergic reaction can occur. This is when the immune system mistakenly considers the allergen to be harmful and attacks the food protein. There are specific signs that a customer is having an allergic reaction. To protect your customers, you should be able to recognize these signs and know what to do. You also should know the types of food that most often cause allergic reactions to help prevent them from happening.

### Allergy Symptoms

Depending on the person, an allergic reaction can happen just after the food is eaten or several hours later. This reaction could include some or all of these symptoms:

- Nausea
- Wheezing or shortness of breath
- Hives or itchy rashes, as shown in the photo at left
- Swelling of various parts of the body, including the face, eyes, hands, or feet
- Vomiting and/or diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Itchy throat



Initially symptoms may be mild, but they can become serious quickly. In severe cases, anaphylaxis—a severe allergic reaction that can lead to death—may result. If a customer is having a severe allergic reaction to food, call the emergency number in your area and inform them of the allergic reaction.

### Common Food Allergens









You and your staff must be aware of the most common food allergens and the menu items that contain them.

While more than 160 food items can cause allergic reactions, just eight of those account for 90 percent of all reactions in the United States. These eight food items are known as the

- **Big Eight** and are shown in Table 2.4.

90% of all reactions in USA

Table 2.4: The Big Eight Allergens

<p>Milk</p>		<p>Soy</p>	
<p>Eggs</p>		<p>Wheat</p>	
<p>Fish such as bass, flounder, and cod</p>		<p>Crustacean shellfish, such as crab, lobster, and shrimp</p>	
<p>Peanuts underground</p>		<p>Tree nuts such as walnuts and pecans</p>	

## Preventing Allergic Reactions

Fifteen million Americans have a food allergy, and allergic reactions result in 200,000 emergency room visits every year. Both service staff and kitchen staff need to do their part to avoid serving food containing allergens to people with food allergies. These precautions also apply to any food sensitivities that a customer might mention, such as a gluten intolerance.

Calories per gram:  
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

**INGREDIENTS:** CHICKEN BROTH, CONTAINS LESS THAN 1% OF THE FOLLOWING: SALT, DEXTROSE, CHICKEN FAT, MONOSODIUM GLUTAMATE, HYDROLYZED WHEAT GLUTEN, NATURAL FLAVORS, AUTOLYZED YEAST EXTRACT, CARROT JUICE CONCENTRATE, MONO AND DIGLYCERIDES, XANTHAN GUM, ONION JUICE CONCENTRATE.

**CONTAINS: WHEAT.**

### Food Labels

Food labels are an important tool used to identify allergens in the products that you purchase. Federal law requires manufactured products containing one or more of the Big Eight allergens to clearly identify them on the ingredient label. The allergen may be included in the common name of the food, such as buttermilk, or it may be shown in parentheses after the ingredient. Often, allergens will be shown in a “contains” statement, such as in the photo at left.

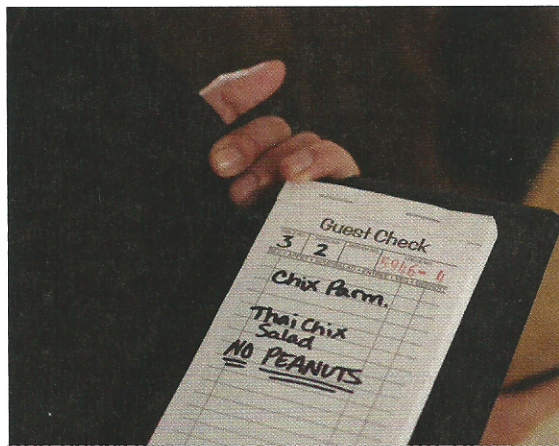
### Service Staff

Your staff should be able to tell customers about menu items that contain potential allergens. At minimum, have one person available per shift to answer customers' questions about menu items. When customers say they have a food allergy, your staff should take it seriously. When working with a customer to place an allergen special order, they must be able to do the following:

**Describe dishes** Tell customers how the item is prepared. Sauces, marinades, and garnishes often contain allergens. For example, peanut butter is sometimes used as a thickener in sauces or marinades. This information is critical to a customer with a peanut allergy.

**Identify ingredients** Tell customers if the food they are allergic to is in the menu item. Identify any “secret” ingredients. For example, your operation may have a house specialty that includes an allergen.

**Suggest items** Suggest menu items that do not



Use separate fryers and cooking oils when frying food for customers with food allergies.

- Label food packaged on-site for retail sale. Name all major allergens on the label and follow any additional labeling requirements.



**Deliver food** Confirm the allergen special order with the kitchen staff when picking up the food. Make sure no garnishes or other items containing the allergen touch the plate. Food should be hand-delivered to guests with allergies. Delivering food separately from the other food delivered to a table, as shown in the photo at right, will help prevent contact with food allergens.

### Kitchen Staff

Staff must make sure that allergens are not transferred from food or food-contact surfaces containing an allergen to the food served to the customer. This is called **cross-contact**. Here are examples of how it can happen:

- Cooking different types of food in the same fryer oil. In the photo at right, shrimp allergens could be transferred to the chicken being fried in the same oil.
- Letting food touch surfaces, equipment, or utensils that have touched allergens. For example, putting chocolate chip cookies on the same parchment paper that was used for peanut butter cookies can transfer some of the peanut allergen.

### How to Avoid Cross-Contact

- Check recipes and ingredient labels to confirm that the allergen is not present.
- Wash, rinse, and sanitize cookware, utensils, and equipment before prepping food. This includes food-prep surfaces. Some operations use a separate set of cooking utensils just for allergen special orders, as shown in the photo at right.
- Make sure the allergen does not touch anything for customers with food allergies, including food, beverages, utensils, equipment, and gloves.
- Wash your hands and change gloves before prepping food.
- Use separate fryers and cooking oils when frying food for customers with food allergies.
- Label food packaged on-site for retail sale. Name all major allergens on the label and follow any additional labeling requirements.



Not cross contamination

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