

TOP TIPS for the Party Organiser!

Gathering Information

When organising a party, it's advisable to send out a circular email to all those invited asking for any special dietary requirements prior to booking. Why? Because some restaurants simply cannot cater for some special diets for example coeliacs struggle to eat in themed or ethnic restaurants where pizza, pasta or soy sauce is a key ingredient.

When deciding on a venue, ask those with the dietary requirements where they have eaten previously, get their recommendations and then check out the menu for the others within the group. If a colleague has multiple allergies, once you have chosen where to go, allow the Food Hypersensitive colleague to call the venue and discuss his/her options direct so it is clear if the venue is able to accommodate their requirements. Confirm in writing all options discussed so both you and the venue are aware of their obligations.

Communication with Venue

When reviewing options, do you know what questions to ask a venue to assess if it is suitable for all those with dietary requirements? Request a copy of the allergy matrix for the full Christmas menu this will also help when deciding on the venue. Show your staff this matrix to clarify what is on offer and any other questions you need to go back to the venue with.

You may need to consider an extreme food allergy, nuts, milk, or eggs and understand, for example, if nuts are handled within a kitchen. Try and get as much information from your colleague as possible, to understand the questions you need to ask the venue to ensure a safe dining experience.

Check and double check the venue – asking for written information as confirmation, plus a contact name for the party!

When a venue tells you 'We can provide for allergies' don't just take their word for it, dig deeper!

For example, Christmas dinner without gravy, without sausages and without stuffing is just dry meat and veg and not a pleasant experience. And because someone is Coeliac does not mean they are vegetarian!

When meals are adapted for allergies, find out what is provided and if replacements for starters and desserts are required, ask the venue to specify what is provided up front. The FreeFrom colleague pays the same why should they miss out?

- For example: starters and desserts, often, drop off the radar for the FreeFrom customer. What is served is melon for starter and fruit salad for dessert. Be ready to warn them that 'fruit is NOT a dessert!' and your FreeFrom colleague would like a choice too!

Venue's Processes

- If chips are part of the meal, ask if separate dedicated fryers are in, some venues may dip roast potatoes in the fryer to coat in oil before roasting so it is worth asking the question.
- If you have someone with a nut allergy, request a menu excluding nuts in any format throughout the menu. In addition, ask how they manage nuts, and will any nut products be handled in the kitchen during service. **Note:** Chestnuts are NOT classed as tree nuts, they are part of the latex family!
- If petite fours and chocolates are served after the meal, ask the venue to supply ingredient information. If they are not suitable, source a small pack that is suitable and this will give your colleague a real surprise.

For the Venues

Have you planned for all possible diners that might be attending your venues? Have you adapted the Christmas menu to cater for as many dietary requirements as possible?

- Some potential diners may have more than one dietary requirement, such as a person needing gluten and dairy free options, has the menu been adapted to suit? Have these changes to the menu included a review to the procedures within the kitchen where necessary?
- This time of year, brings different options on the menu, your allergy matrix will need to be updated and available.
- Is there a seating plan so that all staff working at that time are aware of any tables that have someone with food allergies to prevent any potential mis-serving incidents?

Training is Key!

This is also the time of year for additional staff, who have not received the same level of training as others within the regular team. It would be wise that there is an opportunity made, to carry out an assessment of the procedure when serving a diner with dietary requirements. A trained person that oversees the service(s) and takes on that responsibility is the short-term solution to this potential problem to ensure those diners can enjoy a safe meal.