

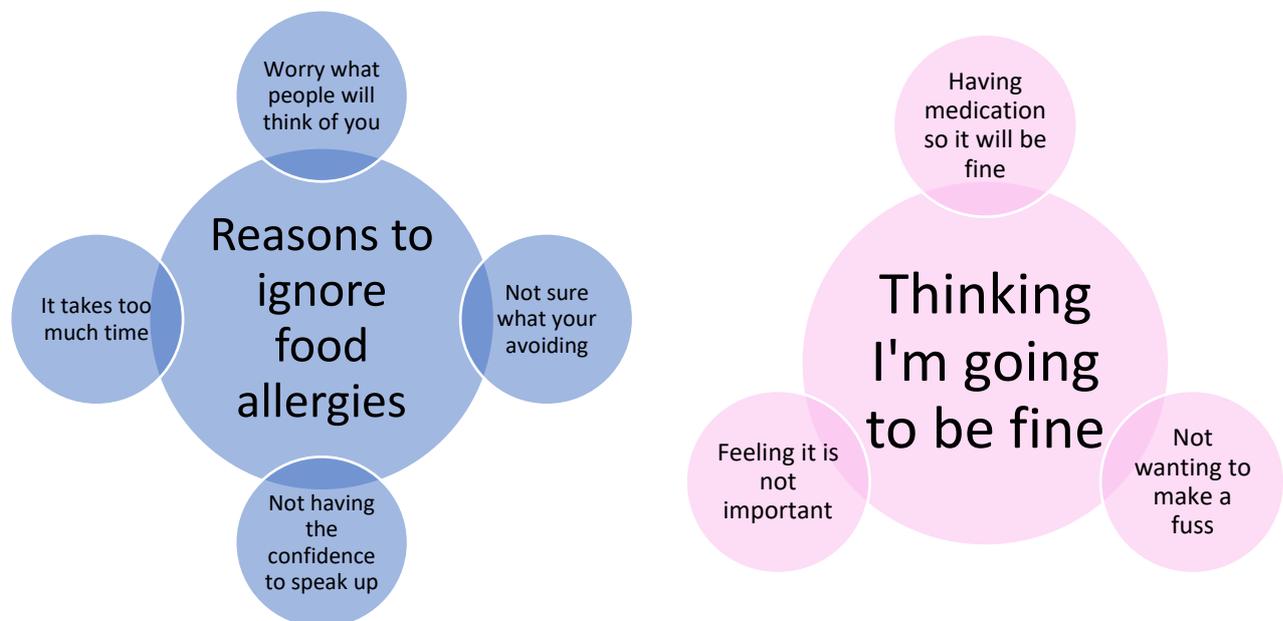
## Taking the time

### Navigating eating with food allergies

Eating with food allergies can feel difficult. Often young people rely on support from friends and family to get it right

Becoming independent with reading food labels and eating out it is a key skill to learn. It will allow you to stay safe whilst enjoying food and social life (pandemics permitting!)

There are reasons why some young people may find this area difficult and they may try and 'ignore' their allergy (see diagram below). This can be a problem, as eating the wrong food by accident can lead to serious reactions.



This blog hopes to help you develop important skills to feel confident and choose safe foods, particularly when out and about. This will take a bit of time. You may want to discuss this with your parents or best friends so they can support you whilst you become more confident and independent.

These are some of the questions young people often ask us in the allergy clinic:

#### **Do I need to read labels, for instance when shopping in the supermarket?**

Yes, always read the label in pre-packed foods! Even if you have eaten the food before, as the ingredients may change from time to time. Take your time. As you practice, you will become faster and more confident. Here are some tips:

## Tip: Common allergens

Pre-packed food is food that is sold fully packaged and cannot be altered unless opened, such as crisps, jars of sauce and boxes of cereals for example. All **pre-packed foods** must by law have a label that includes the **list of ingredients**. You will need to read it carefully. If you spot any food you are allergic to, do not eat the food.

If a pre-packed food produced in the UK or the EU contains any of the **14 most common allergens** in the list below, the allergen must be clearly stated in **bold**, *italics*, **highlighted in colour** or underlined. Large supermarket chains in the UK and EU follow this requirement in their pre-packed products, including those imported from outside the UK or EU, so it should be easy to spot any of these 14 allergens if you are allergic to any of them.

- **Milk**
- **Egg**
- **Peanut**
- **Tree nuts**
- **Sesame seeds**
- **Soya**
- **Fish**
- **Crustaceans (a type of shellfish, like prawns)**
- **Molluscs (a type of shellfish like scallops or squid)**
- **Cereals (gluten, wheat, rye, barley, oats)**
- **Mustard seed**
- **Lupin**
- **Celery**
- **Sulpha dioxide/sulphites**

This is an example of a label with allergens in **bold**,



### Tip: Less common allergens

Some people are allergic to foods that are not in the list above, for instance legumes like lentils or fruits like kiwi. If you have any food allergies that are not in the list, you will need to read the ingredients more carefully as these food names may be less obvious.

If you are not sure, do not eat the food!

### Is there app to help read labels?

Yes! Apps such as Food Maestro can help with food allergies when shopping and can be downloaded for free.

You can set up a personal profile, selecting the any of the 14 allergens you are avoiding, allowing you to scan barcodes whilst shopping, search foods (including some readymade list of foods such as 'no milk or soya desserts' and 'no nuts chocolate') and access Food Standard Agency food alerts.

If you are avoiding additional foods, such as coconut or kiwi for example, these can be added in the 'ingredients' tab (see circled in picture).



### Is it safe to eat foods labelled as 'may contain' or 'made in a factory'?

These labels are called 'precautionary labelling' and you should avoid products that 'may contain' the food you are allergic to. This is because there is a risk of cross contamination, that is small amounts of allergens accidentally get into foods or products. This can happen in factories that make lots of different foods. For example, when plain chocolate bars are made in the same factory as chocolate bars containing nuts.

Snack-type products such as cereals, cereal bars, bakery, sweets like chocolates and confectionary are more likely to be contaminated with nuts, and these should be avoided when they have 'may contain' labels.

Many people think that if they have been fine with a product before, this means they are ok and will never react to 'may contain' labels or 'traces' of the food. This is not the case. Most products with such labels are not contaminated, but you may come across one randomly that is and have a reaction.



**Some foods do not have a label or a 'proper label', for instance in bakeries. What do I do then?**

That's true. In addition to pre-packed foods, there are two more types of food packaging (based on the Food standard agency):

- Non-packaged foods: this covers all loose foods such as breads, cakes from a counter in a bakery to sweets from a pick and mix. Allergen information for these foods must be supplied however this can be done in various ways such as a food label presented beside the food, on a menu or chalk board.

If allergens are not clearly labelled **you will be expected to ask about allergens**, there will hopefully be a folder with allergen information that staff will be able to discuss with you. Staff working in food outlets should receive training regarding allergens and how to minimise cross contamination, meaning they should be able to answer your questions.

## FOOD ALLERGIES and INTOLERANCES

Please speak to our staff about the ingredients  
in your meal, when making your order.

- Pre- packed for direct sell; this is food that is packaged on the same premises such as sandwiches or pies from a shop like a bakery. Right now, these foods do not need to be labelled, **you** are expected to ask about allergens. This is an example of how a label may look like for these products. This is generally less informative than labels in pre-packed foods.



From October 2021 the Natasha's law will come into effect, meaning foods prepacked for direct sell must have a food label clearly labelling allergens, as well as full ingredients list, like for pre-packed foods.

### **And what about when eating out at restaurants or from a take away?**

If you are looking at options of eating out in restaurants or get a takeaway, it is always great to be able to plan ahead, if possible check out their website for their menu and allergen information. Decide what you want to order and prepare questions to ask about:

1. Ingredients: what goes into the food you want?
  - Oriental cuisine, such as Chinese and Thai food often contains nuts
  - Seafood restaurants are high risk for fish, shellfish and molluscs
  - Sauces often have hidden ingredients such as wheat, ground nuts and peanuts
  - Bread rolls may contain seeds
2. How is it prepared?
  - Fried foods are high risk of cross contamination, as often multiple foods are prepared in the same fryer
  - Grilled foods are often viewed as safer options as pans are cleaned in-between dishes
  - It's important to be aware that there is a higher risk of cross-contamination in restaurants and takeaways that are busy and prepare multiple dishes

If you feel unsure that the restaurant or takeaway is unable to provide safe food for you to eat, thank them for the information and choose to eat somewhere else. Having the confidence to choose somewhere safe to eat will mean the experience will be more enjoyable.

For more info: [A Guide to Eating Out - Anaphylaxis Campaign](#)

Join the 'Easy to ASK' campaign **#easytoASK**

A: always ask about allergens

S: speak up

K: keep safe: you are unsure, leave it and **#takethekit**

[Easy to ASK Campaign \(allergyuk.org\)](http://allergyuk.org)

[Easy to ASK Campaign - Anaphylaxis Campaign](#)

[Take The Kit Campaign \(2019\) - Anaphylaxis UK](#)



### Are 'free from' foods safe for people with food allergy?

This is a special food range that guarantees the food is made without certain allergens. It requires to pass specific and rigorous controls. For instance, 'free from gluten' pasta means it does not contain gluten.

Some people believe 'free from' foods are free from any allergen. This is not the case. For instance 'gluten free pasta' can contain egg as an ingredient, which some people are allergic to. You need to check the ingredient list for any other allergens that are relevant to you.



## Is vegan or vegetarian food safe for people with food allergy?

Vegan or vegetarian food does not guarantee it is 'free from' any allergen. For instance, vegetarian food often contains milk, which is an animal product. Also, contamination with animal products can occur. It is always best to ask if you are not sure.

### If you would like to read more....

[Travelling with food allergy - Allergy UK](#)

[Living with food allergy - British Dietetic Association](#)

[Types of food allergy – Allergy UK](#)

If you find this blog useful or you want to make suggestions, then please [let us know](#).

Also please help raise awareness! Use **#easytoASK** and **#takethekit** when out shopping or eating to help others with food allergies!

Thank you!

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