



## Tips on cooking for people with food allergies

### **Know what allergens to avoid**

If you are cooking for your family, then you should already be aware of which allergens to avoid in your meals. However, if you are having guests over for dinner, make sure to find out if they have any allergies that you should know about.

### **Be mindful of allergen cross contamination**

Cross contamination occurs when an ingredient (food allergen) is transferred to a product that should not have that ingredient in it. Cross contamination of allergens makes food dangerous to eat for those who are allergic. It can happen during food manufacturing through shared production and packaging equipment; at retail, through shared equipment and storage; and, during food preparation at home or in restaurants when handling food, equipment and utensils or when there is inadequate cleaning of food preparation surfaces and hands.

### **Do not share food**

When preparing and serving allergen-free food, encourage your guests not to trade or share food, utensils or food containers. There is still a chance that someone may have allergen particles on their hands which could be transferred during a food exchange.

### **Keep it clean**

Always ensure that surfaces such as tables, utensils and containers are clean before preparing food. Wash your hands both before and after eating.

### **Read product labels carefully**

Learn to read food labels and check ingredients carefully every time. Be aware that there are alternate names for allergens. Avoid buying food products that do not have an ingredient list. If an ingredient list says a product "may contain" a particular allergen, do not use it. If you do not recognize an ingredient or there is no ingredient list available, avoid the product. Manufacturers may occasionally change their recipes or use different ingredients for varieties of the same brand. Also, a brand may have different labeling or precautionary warnings in different countries, so it is important to be vigilant when traveling.

### **Find safe ingredients**

Finding ingredients for allergen-free recipes can sometimes be challenging. Some ingredients can be hard to find even in otherwise well-stocked supermarkets or health food stores. Talk to the manager of your local supermarket or health food store. He or she may be willing to make a special order on your behalf, especially if you are willing to buy a large quantity of a given product.

### **Adapt recipes for allergies**

Familiarize yourself with safe foods that are common substitutes for allergens so that you can adapt all your family favourite recipes, or those you find in cookbooks or magazines. There are also ingredients on the market that are safe substitutes for the most common allergens. These alternatives will give you the best chance of turning out allergy-safe dishes that taste like the original.

**Have an epinephrine auto-injector (e.g., EpiPen®) nearby**

Allergists recommend that if a person with food allergies does not have an epinephrine auto-injector with them, then he or she should not eat. Always ensure that an epinephrine auto-injector is within arm's reach when serving food to a person with severe food allergies.

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