



From: www.cofargroup.org

AVOIDING CROSS-CONTACT WITH FOOD ALLERGENS

What is “Cross Contact”?

This happens when an “un-safe” food allergen accidentally comes in contact with an allergen “safe” food.

As a result, the safe food contains small amounts of the allergen and could cause a reaction in persons who are sensitive.

How can I look out for and prevent “Cross Contact”?

It is helpful to understand the ways cross-contact can happen.

Manufactured (labeled) products might volunteer that their product could have accidental inclusion of an allergen by using “advisory” warnings such as: “May contain [allergen]” or “Processed in a facility that also processes [allergen]”. These should be avoided.

Review the following examples, teach others, and ask appropriate questions when obtaining food outside the home.

Examples of Cross Contact in the Home

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Solution(s)</i>
A knife used to spread peanut butter may also be dipped in the jelly jar, tainting the jelly with peanut protein.	Keep a separate jelly jar for the child with allergies. Use clean knives in Jelly first. Some families choose to eliminate peanut from the household.
Preparing an allergen (e.g., chopping walnuts on a counter surface) and then a safe food (e.g., slicing tomatoes) without properly cleaning.	Make the allergen safe food first. Clean cooking equipment including the cooking area with hot soapy water.
Ingredients from an allergenic food may splatter, splash or spill into the allergen free food.	Prepare the allergen free foods first, cover and remove from the cooking area prior to preparing the foods for other members of the household.
Allergen free foods may come in contact with an allergen in storage, in the refrigerator or the cupboard.	Designate a separate shelf in the refrigerator and cupboard for allergen free foods. This shelf should be above the shelf that may store foods with potential allergens. Consider using stickers to identify “safe” foods.



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Examples of Cross Contact in Foods from Stores

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Solution (s)</i>
Ice cream shops use the same scoop for multiple flavors thereby causing cross contact with a flavor that may have been safe.	Soft serve ice cream from a separate machines dedicated to one flavor may be safe. Avoid toppings.
In a grocery, open barrel foods may get cross contacted with allergens.	Select manufacturer pre-packaged foods with labels.
A bakery may use allergens without cleaning mixing bowls, baking pans, etc. between uses.	Review your concerns with responsible staff and discuss whether an allergen-safe item can be purchased.
Inadequate cleaning of equipment (for example a grinder used to make peanut and cashew butter, or a mixer used for soy and milk drinks) may expose a food to allergen cross contact.	Ask specific questions about how and when the equipment is cleaned if the equipment is/is not dedicated to one type of food.
Delicatessens may slice various meats and cheeses on shared equipment. Meats could contain allergenic ingredients such as milk, soy, wheat or nuts.	Choose safe packaged meats or ask your delicatessen to slice your order first thing in the morning on a clean machine (and set aside for later pick up).

Examples of Cross Contact in Restaurants

<i>Problem</i>	<i>Solution (s)</i>
Shared grills, pans, utensils, food processors and other equipment may be used without thorough cleaning between the preparations of different dishes	Ask that your food be prepared with clean and separate pans, utensils, and all cooking areas and equipment. Suggest cooking on clean tin foil.
In a Chinese restaurant, a wok may not be cleaned between the preparations of multiple dishes.	Ask for a dish prepared in a clean wok with clean utensils. Depending on the allergen, some families avoid Asian restaurants.
Foods deep fried in a fryer will come in contact with the proteins of other foods previously fried in the fryer	Ask if the fryer used is dedicated to one food. If not, ask for your food to be pan fried or oven fried using clean pans and utensils
The “finishing” chef (or wait staff) may be responsible for the garnish or adding the final touch (such as a pat of butter to a meat dish).	Speak to the person who will be responsible for preparing your safe meal and ask that he/she deliver directly to you
Cafeteria lines and buffets may have greater risk of cross contact due to shared utensils and spills	Avoid buffets. If eating in a school cafeteria, have the food service manager keep the safe food separate to prevent cross contact

RESOURCES

- This program has additional information sheets that you may find helpful
- Explore web sites such as www.foodallergy.org

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