

AllergyEats: Celiac and Gluten-Intolerant Guests Should Be Careful of Gluten-Free Menus***Some Restaurants Aren't Offering True Gluten-Free Meals,
So Always Be Vigilant When Dining Out***

BOSTON, MA (November 21, 2011) . %Gluten-free+is a growing trend, with an increasing number of restaurants now offering gluten-free menu options, but some establishments haven't been properly trained around gluten intolerance and food allergies. As a result, they're serving %gluten-free+meals that actually contain gluten, and guests are getting sick from these mistakes. Paul Antico, founder of AllergyEats (www.allergyeats.com), the biggest and fastest growing online source for finding allergy-friendly restaurants, reminds people with celiac disease, gluten intolerance and other food allergies to *always be vigilant* when dining out.

Gluten is a protein composite found in foods processed from wheat and related grains, including barley and rye. For people with celiac disease and gluten intolerance, consuming even small quantities of gluten can cause *severe* abdominal distress, in some cases resulting in hospitalization.

"The primary reason for restaurants' errors is the lack of knowledge and understanding around cross-contamination. Cross-contamination occurs when a meal that's supposed to be gluten-free comes in contact with gluten. For instance, if a chef cooks a piece of fish in a pan that previously held breadcrumbs, that fish has been cross-contaminated with gluten and isn't safe for a celiac or gluten-intolerant diner to eat," Antico explained.

%Just because a restaurant offers gluten-free menu options doesn't mean you'll get a gluten-free meal. There are a growing number of news stories and online chatter about people with severe gluten intolerances who have gotten sick after consuming meals that were supposed to be gluten-free. Recently, at least four major restaurant chains . and many independent restaurants . have been spotlighted for serving gluten-free meals that have contained gluten,+said Antico. "A major benefit to using AllergyEats is the valuable, peer-based feedback highlighting which restaurants 'get it,' in terms of accommodating gluten-intolerant and food-allergic guests with more care, and which restaurants don't, so individuals can make more informed decisions about where to eat."

%The gluten-free label is giving guests . and restaurant staff . a false sense of security. People with food allergies or intolerances need to ask questions *every time* they dine out, always double-checking ingredient lists and determining the risks of cross-contamination,+Antico explained.

%We heard so many similar stories recently. People go in and order the gluten-free options but don't discuss the food preparation policies, the possibility of cross-contamination or the exact ingredient lists with the restaurant staff, and they become horribly sick because of errors at restaurants. Guests with gluten-intolerance and food allergies need to be aware, ask questions and do their research,+ Antico said. %The increasing number of mistakes is alarming and reinforces the importance of constant vigilance within the gluten-intolerance and food allergy communities.+

Some restaurants post disclosures saying they won't guarantee gluten-free meals because of the possibility of cross-contamination. Applebee's, for instance, has posted on their website's allergy information page, %Please be aware that during normal kitchen operations involving shared cooking and preparation areas, including common fryer oil, the possibility exists for food items to come in

contact with other food products. Due to these circumstances, we are unable to guarantee that any menu item can be completely free of allergens.+

Antico urges the restaurant industry to increase their knowledge and training around gluten intolerance and food allergy issues, ensuring that safety protocols are always followed. Restaurants should be careful not to cross-contaminate, always know exactly what ingredients are in every meal . including sauces, marinades and breading . and be willing to substitute appropriately for their gluten-intolerant or food-allergic guests.

%Certain restaurants really understand and accommodate diners with celiac disease, gluten intolerance and food allergies and others do not. Restaurants like PF Chang\$, Legal Sea Foods and Outback Steakhouse have great gluten-free options and are happy to accommodate guests with special dietary restrictions. Alternatively, a growing number of gluten-intolerant diners have had negative experiences at other chain and independent restaurants, which won't guarantee gluten-free meals, despite sharing gluten-free menus or options on their websites. Therefore, it's no surprise that these establishments receive consistently poor AllergyEats allergy-friendliness ratings,+Antico continued.

AllergyEats is a free, user-friendly resource that provides valuable peer-based feedback about how well (or poorly) restaurants accommodate the needs of gluten-intolerant and food-allergic customers. Most restaurant review sites include information about establishmentsqfood, ambiance or service, but AllergyEats is singularly focused on food allergies, with peer reviews spotlighting where people with food allergies or intolerances have more comfortably eaten and where theyqe encountered challenges.

AllergyEats also indicates which restaurants have been certified by the Gluten Intolerance Group\$, Gluten-Free Restaurant Awareness Program (GFRAP) or trained in the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness\$, Gluten-Free Restaurant Education and Awareness Training (GREAT) program.

The core AllergyEats website (www.allergyeats.com) and the new, free AllergyEats app (available at iTunes and the Android store) list more than 600,000 restaurants nationwide, which users can rate. The peer ratings and feedback (and certifications from highly respected gluten-free organizations) allow gluten-intolerant and food-allergic diners to quickly and easily find restaurants that will accommodate their special dietary requirements . and avoid the ones that wonq. Users can easily access information for many restaurants such as menus (including gluten-free menus), allergen lists, nutrition information, certifications, web links, directions and more.

Whenever people dine out, whether their experience was positive, negative or somewhere in between, Antico urges them to take just a minute to rate the restaurant on AllergyEats or on the new AllergyEats app. This valuable feedback helps the entire food allergy and intolerance community make more informed decisions about where to dine out . and which restaurants to avoid.

AllergyEats has been endorsed by highly-respected food, health and allergy organizations and individuals, including the Gluten Intolerance Group, Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Massachusetts Restaurant Association, Chef Ming Tsai and more. For more information, please visit www.AllergyEats.com.

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