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AllergyEats: A Helpful, Free Resource for the Holidays: Reduces Stress Around Dining Out, Parties and Traveling

Growing Site, App & Online Community Offer Valuable Information For People with Food Allergies & Intolerances

BOSTON, MA (December 17, 2012) – During the holidays, many of us dine out more often, while traveling to visit family and friends, shopping for gifts or vacationing during school break. For the over 15 million people with food allergies and intolerances, dining out can be tremendously stressful, especially when navigating unfamiliar restaurants. AllergyEats (www.allergyeats.com), the most comprehensive source for finding allergy-friendly restaurants, offers a solution. The free website, smartphone app and online community provide valuable, peer-based information about how well – or poorly – restaurants accommodate people with food allergies and intolerances, helping these individuals make more informed decisions about which restaurants to visit and which to avoid.

“Much of the holidays revolve around food, which can be a huge source of anxiety for people with food allergies and intolerances. [AllergyEats](http://www.allergyeats.com), a peer-based website, smartphone app and social media community, can help reduce that stress dramatically by aiding food-allergic and gluten intolerant individuals in finding accommodating restaurants,” said Paul Antico, Founder of AllergyEats, father of three food-allergic children and passionate food allergy advocate.

Antico, who has dined out extensively with his three food-allergic children, offers the following tips to other food-allergic families who are navigating the holiday season – and all of the restaurant meals, parties and travel stops that go with it:

- **Research restaurants in advance.** Whether you're traveling across town or across the country, conduct online research about restaurants' allergy-friendliness, as well as their menus, ingredient lists and allergen statements. A site like [AllergyEats](http://www.allergyeats.com) can be incredibly helpful, allowing you to find restaurants where other food-allergic diners have had positive experiences and avoid the ones that are less allergy-friendly. Additionally, interactive smartphone apps, like the free AllergyEats app, provide mobile access to peer-based allergy-friendliness restaurant ratings, as well as restaurants' websites, menus, allergen lists, certifications, phone numbers and more.
- **Plan the party, whenever possible.** If your family and friends are gathering at a restaurant for a special holiday meal, offer to spearhead the event planning. That way, you can select an establishment that's more allergy-friendly and better able to accommodate your special dietary restrictions.

- **Call ahead.** This tip is valuable year-round, but it's especially important during the busy holiday season. Call the restaurant in advance to inform them of your food allergies and ask about their food allergy protocols. If you're attending a party, ask if the restaurant's chef can prepare an allergen-free meal for you.
- **Be prepared.** Always travel with Epi-pens, Benadryl or other allergy medications in case of an allergic reaction. Make sure someone else at the party knows about your allergies, signs of a reaction and emergency procedures – especially if your reactions could be severe. Even restaurants with the best intentions and food allergy protocols can occasionally have a mishap, so always be prepared in case of an emergency.
- **Consider simple foods.** Depending on your comfort with the restaurant's staff, allergy knowledge, and procedures, you may want to consider ordering something basic, such as broiled chicken or fish versus a meal with complicated breadings, sauces or marinades.
- **Avoid buffets at restaurants and parties.** Even if a dish wasn't cooked with peanuts, dairy, eggs, gluten, or your other allergy triggers, it can easily be cross-contaminated from other items or utensils in a buffet. Avoid buffets altogether and ask for a separate plate of food free of your food allergens.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** If you're allergic to peanuts, instead of asking whether French fries are cooked in peanut oil, which results in a yes or no answer, ask what kind of oil is used in the fryer. This reduces the chance that the server will "guess" at the answer. Be proactive and ask about restaurants' food-allergy protocols, ingredient lists, and meal preparation techniques - but in a way that inspires dialogue, rather than simple yes or no answers.
- **Stay vigilant wherever you go.** Your favorite local restaurant may be terrific about accommodating your food allergies, but never assume that another restaurant – even if it's part of the same chain – will be able to cater to your needs, as well. Also, during the busy holiday season, many restaurants bring on additional staff, that may not be trained as extensively as the year-round staff. Be cautious every time you dine out – even if you eat at the restaurant regularly.
- **Read ingredient lists and labels.** Don't be shy about asking to read the ingredient labels at restaurants to avoid products containing your allergy triggers. By double-checking labels, you can feel more confident that the sauces, breads and other foods are free of your allergens.
- **Leverage the food allergy community for advice, tips and info-sharing.** Discussions on food allergy Blogs and social media sites (including the AllergyEats Facebook page and blog: <http://www.facebook.com/AllergyEats> and www.allergyeats.com/Blog) contain helpful information from the food allergy community. These forums offer great tips, advice and "lessons learned" about traveling with food allergies.
- **Trust your instincts.** Does the restaurant's server, manager and/or chef appear confident and knowledgeable about how to handle your special meal preparation? If not, leave and find another restaurant.

AllergyEats lists more than 575,000 restaurants nationwide, which food allergic diners can rate. The site also offers information on restaurants' menus (including gluten-free

menus), allergen lists, nutrition information, certifications, web links, directions and more. The site, app and related social media sites help families with food allergies reduce the guesswork - and the anxiety - surrounding dining out with food allergies.

Most restaurant review sites include information about establishments' food, 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.

AllergyEats has been endorsed by highly-respected food, health and allergy organizations and individuals, including the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, Gluten Intolerance Group, Massachusetts Restaurant Association, Chef Ming Tsai, Chef Joel Schaefer and more. AllergyEats was recently selected as the About.com 2012 Readers' Choice Award winner for best Food Allergy App. The AllergyEats smartphone app also won a Web Health Award and was honored as one of Healthline's Top Ten Food Allergy Apps. For more information, please visit www.AllergyEats.com.

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