



# Food Safety

## Food Allergens

### how much do you know?

Food allergy awareness week in Australia is from the 17th to the 23rd May 2009, so you may have noticed that media publicity has increased over the past month. Recent news articles are quoting that the incidence of food allergies has *doubled* in the past five years.

While this statistic is alarming, what are the facts?

90% of all food allergies in Australia are attributed to only 9 protein rich ingredients:

- Peanuts
- Tree nuts
- Sesame seeds
- Egg
- Milk
- Fish
- Crustaceans
- Soy beans
- Wheat and other gluten containing grains

As a food service operator, you need to know if any of these ingredients are contained in the food items that you serve. While food service providers who make and sell their food products at the same facility are not required to label their food, they are required to provide information on what is contained in food items that they prepare. Most food service operators are unaware that this is a requirement of the FSANZ Food Standards Code. Responses to customer enquiries such as: "The chef is not here", "I don't know", "It shouldn't have", "The recipe is a

secret, and I don't want to tell you" etc. are all unacceptable (and illegal). Food allergens are a very real risk to the food service industry, though most operators that I speak to ignore the need to make their food businesses allergy aware. According to Anaphylaxis Australia, food allergy occurs in around 1 in 20 children and in 1-2 per 100 adults. While the majority of food allergies in children are not severe, and will disappear over time, peanuts, tree nuts, seeds and seafood tend to cause life-long allergies. Some food allergies can be severe, causing a life-threatening reaction known as anaphylaxis. Approximately 10 Australians die each year from consuming foods they are allergic to, however thousands more have life threatening allergic reactions, and are rushed to hospital and thankfully recover. More than half of these reactions are attributed to the food service industry.

Please keep in mind that many other foods over and above this list can cause a reaction, in various degrees, to your customers. All special dietary requests due to any allergy *must* be taken seriously!

So how can you handle enquiries in a timely and cost effective manner? Simple strategies such as having standard recipes available, preparing an allergen matrix and staff training will all assist with handling customer enquiries.

I have placed onto my food safety

blog a list of resources to assist the food service industry with handling customer enquiries. There is also a snippet from an interactive CD that I was part of, which assists the food service industry on handling customer enquiries. At \$15 it is fantastic value. In coming months I will be doing some work shops around Australia for food service operators on food allergies. Let me know if you are interested.

Until next edition,  
Eat well. Eat safe!

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#### References:

##### Gavin's Blog:

[www.australianfoodsafety.com.au/blog](http://www.australianfoodsafety.com.au/blog)

##### Become a member of Anaphylaxis Australia:

<http://www.allergyfacts.org.au/index.html>

**WIN!**

#### Question of the Month

Do you have anything you'd like to know about? The next Question of the Month will be awarded a probe thermometer valued at \$60.00. To contact me, go to [www.gourmetguardian.com.au](http://www.gourmetguardian.com.au) for your chance to learn AND win!