

## Allergens and Cross-Contamination

### Background:

-Food allergies are serious and patients rely on you to provide accurate information and serve them safe foods. In fact, half of all fatal reactions are triggered by foods that were prepared by others and thought to be safe.

-Simply stated, about 1 in every 25 adults will have a food allergy. For kids, this number grows to about 1 in 13. So take allergens and patients questions about allergens seriously.

### Allergens: What are they?

-Speaking of questions, what is an allergen? An allergen is any substance that causes an allergic reaction, often a protein.

-“The Top 8” food allergens are:

-milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts (cashews, almonds, walnuts), wheat, soy, fish and shellfish

-The top 8 food allergens account for about 90% food allergy reactions

-In the US, the FDA requires that the top 8 allergens are listed on the label of any packaged food item. If you are unsure of whether a menu item has an allergen in it, check the label or ask a manager or dietitian to help you. DON'T EVER GUESS. A small amount of an allergen can be fatal.

### Allergy vs Intolerance:

-Food allergies are often confused with food intolerance because they can cause similar symptoms, however they're not the same thing.

-A food intolerance only affects the stomach and GI tract when the food is consumed. Not life-threatening.

-A food allergy will affect the whole body and can be fatal.

### What You Can Do to Prevent Allergic Reactions:

-Diet Office: thoroughly read diet orders and put allergy stickers on patient menus. Cross off any menu items that would cause an allergic reaction.

-Catering Associates: when doing menus with patients, help them decide what they can and can't eat by knowing what's in the food and answering questions. Always yell out allergies during tray line.

-Cooks, Prep and Servers: Avoid cross-contamination.

-Use separate utensils when working with allergens

-Thoroughly clean and sanitize equipment in between use

-Practice good hygiene (wash your hands often, change your gloves when working with allergens).

-Clean counters and other surfaces after they've been in contact with allergens.