

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Consumer Preferences for Written and Oral Information about Allergens When Eating Out

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Abstract

Background

Avoiding food allergens when eating outside the home presents particular difficulties for food allergic (FA) and intolerant (FI) consumers and a lack of allergen information in restaurants and takeaways causes unnecessary restrictions. Across Europe, legislation effective from December 2014, aims to improve allergen information by requiring providers of non-prepacked foods to supply information related to allergen content within their foods.

Methods

Using in-depth interviews with 60 FA/FI adults and 15 parents/carers of FA/FI children, we aimed to identify FA/FI consumers' preferences for written and/or verbal allergen information when eating out or ordering takeaway food.

Results

A complex and dynamic set of preferences and practices for written and verbal allergen information was identified. Overwhelmingly, written information was favoured in the first instance, but credible personal/verbal communication was highly valued and essential to a good eating out experience. Adequate written information facilitated implicit trust in subsequent verbal information. Where written information was limited, FA/FIs depended on social cues to assess the reliability of verbal information resources, and defaulted to tried and tested allergen avoidance strategies when these were deemed unreliable.

Conclusion

Understanding the subtle negotiations and difficulties encountered by FA/FIs when eating out can serve as a guide for legislators and food providers; by encouraging provision of clear written and verbal allergen information, and training of proactive, allergen-aware staff. This, in tandem with legal requirements for allergen information provision, paves the way for

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FA/FIs to feel more confident in eating out choices; and to experience improved eating out experiences.

Introduction

For individuals who experience food allergy (FA) and food intolerance (FI) avoidance of allergens is the key recommended strategy in preventing negative health outcomes. Accidental allergen ingestion is potentially life threatening for many FA individuals [1, 2], and can account for a substantial number of 'healthy' days lost in FA/FI populations [3]. Twenty-one to 31% of such accidental allergen ingestion occurs when eating in restaurants and 13–23% occurs in other eating out environments such as work or school canteens [4]. As a result, eating out presents a particular challenge for FA/FI individuals, and is a broader public health concern for legislators, food providers, and the wider community as a whole.

In order to improve the provision of food allergen information for FA/FI consumers when eating out, Europe wide EU legislation was introduced in December 2014. This requires providers of non-prepacked foods to supply written and verbal information related to the content of one or more of 14 specified food allergens within their foods. Within the UK, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has provided guidance on how allergen information might be provided [5]. However, the guidance regarding the format for delivery of this information is broad and at the discretion of individual eating out providers. Little is known about the preferences for such information provision from FA/FI populations' perspectives. Understanding these perspectives prior to the legislation's introduction was vital in order to provide legislators and eating out providers with insights into FA/FI's information delivery preferences; thereby informing initial and ongoing implementation of improvements in allergen information provision for the benefit of FA/FI consumers.

We explored the allergen-related information delivery preferences of FA/FI populations when eating out or ordering takeaway foods. Results serve to inform legislators in their future recommendations for allergen information provision, and act as a guide of 'good practice' for food providers who are required to supply food allergen information for FA/FI consumers.

Background

Within Europe, FA affects up to 5% of adults and 8% of children [6], and the prevalence of FI is thought to be substantially greater [7, 8]. For FAs, accidental consumption of food allergens accounts for 32.2% of anaphylaxis-related hospital admissions [9], and eating outside the home has been implicated in 50% of deaths related to food allergen consumption [10]. Whilst morbidity and mortality rates are generally low, symptom-based figures underestimate the ongoing impact of food allergen avoidance on FA/FI individuals' well-being, and decrements in quality of life have been reported alongside significant restrictions in social and behavioural outcomes for these populations [11–14].

The implications of having to exclude one or more foods from the diet can present wide-ranging and unique challenges for FA and FI populations. FA populations describe the need for constant vigilance, with no guarantee that their efforts will be effective in ensuring successful avoidance of the offending food. This has been termed 'trying to control the uncontrollable' [15](p. 284). Both FA and FI consumers express concerns regarding the risks posed when consuming foods which they have not prepared; and eating out or ordering takeaway food in particular [16–19]. This apprehension may be justified given literature suggesting a mismatch

between restaurant staff's confidence in their knowledge of food allergens, and the knowledge actually exhibited in practice [20] [21].

EU legislation [22] introduced in December 2014 affects restaurants, takeaway shops, food stalls, institutions like prisons and nursing homes as well as workplace and school canteens. The regulations require food providers to supply customers with accurate and accessible information relating to the inclusion of any of the allergens—peanuts, tree nuts, milk, soya, mustard, lupin, eggs, fish, molluscs, crustaceans, cereals containing gluten, sesame seeds, celery, and sulphur dioxide at levels above 10mg/kg, or 10 mg/litre—in their foods. Allergen information can be provided in written or verbal form. Where verbal information is provided, there must also be written information within the venue that customers can be directed to.

Whilst the intention of the legislation is to provide FA/FI populations with clearer information regarding allergenic ingredients, little is known about how consumers prefer allergen information to be delivered when they eat out—through staff or through written sources of information—or what leads to trust or distrust in these sources. Findings from research into the labelling of pre-packed foods suggest that FA customers combine information seeking strategies by using allergen advice boxes in conjunction with ingredients lists and familiarity cues to minimise their risk of accidental allergen consumption [23]. When offered the option of an information resource in addition to packet labelling, FAs favoured a telephone advice line over an information website; perhaps suggesting that verbal information—though not face to face in this instance—has a particular role in generating trust [24]. The relationship between verbal and written information preferences becomes much more significant when eating out and consuming non-prepacked foods. Although in theory FA/FI individuals have the opportunity to discuss their dietary requirements with staff when eating out, communication difficulties are common; leading to social embarrassment, misunderstanding, and misinformation [16, 17]. This can lead FA/FIs to unduly limit their food selections, or to take unnecessary risks when eating out.

We aimed to understand the preferences and trust cues used by FA/FI individuals when eating out in order to inform the provision of allergen information resources and to outline the implications of this for legislators, food providers, and the wider community. Conducted in the 6 months immediately prior to implementation of EU FIC (1169/2011) legislation, our research is the first to assess the allergen information delivery preferences of both FA and FI populations when eating out; and in particular, their preferences for written and verbal information. This research constitutes phase 1 of the project and ongoing follow-up research will assess the impact of ongoing changes in allergen information provision on FA/FI's eating out preferences and behaviours.

Methods

Recruitment and population

Ethical approval was gained from the University of Bath, Department of Psychology Ethics Committee prior to participant recruitment (Ethical Approval Ref: 14–055). A specialist market research agency recruited 75 participants to complete in-depth interviews. Of the total population, 60 were adults reporting FA/FI, and 15 were parents/carers of children aged up to 17 years with FA/FI. Within the latter group, although the experience of parents/carers was the primary focus of the interview, their FA/FI children were sometimes present and contributed to it. In order to represent the views of consumers throughout the UK, participants were recruited from England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. A breakdown of participant characteristics is shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Characteristics of the 75 food allergy/intolerance adult participants and children of parent/carer participants.

Variable	Allergy n = 39	Intolerance n = 36	Total (%) N = 75
Sex:			
Male	7 (17.9)	9 (25.0)	16 (21.3)
Female	32 (82.1)	27 (75.0)	59 (78.7)
Age:			
<8	2 (5.1)	2 (5.5)	4 (5.3)
8–12	3 (7.7)	0	3 (4.0)
13–17	4 (10.3)	4 (11.1)	8 (10.7)
18–30	9 (23.1)	8 (22.2)	17 (22.7)
31–45	10 (25.6)	8 (22.2)	18 (24.0)
46–60	5 (12.8)	9 (25.0)	14 (18.7)
60+	6 (15.4)	5 (13.9)	11 (14.7)
Region:			
England	15 (38.5)	17 (47.2)	32 (42.7)
N Ireland	4 (10.3)	6 (16.7)	10 (13.3)
Scotland	10 (25.6)	8 (22.2)	18 (24.0)
Wales	10 (25.6)	5 (13.9)	15 (20.0)

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Prior to interview, participants completed a screening questionnaire characterising their or (for parents) their child's reactions to one or more of the 14 specified allergens. Characteristics were based on nature of reaction, speed of onset, and how FA/FI was diagnosed. This information was used to classify participants as IgE-mediated FA; or non IgE-mediated FA/FI which was either medically or non-medically/self-diagnosed. Thirty-nine participants (52%) were classified as having IgE-mediated FA, and thirty-six (48%) were classified as non IgE-mediated FA/FI. Of the 14 allergens covered by the legislation, FA/FI to peanuts, tree nuts, milk, soya, mustard, lupin, fish, crustaceans, cereals containing gluten, sesame seeds, celery, and/or sulphur dioxide were reported. No participants reported FA/FI to lupin or molluscs.

Procedure

Following written informed consent, in-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with participants in their own homes on the basis of an interview protocol detailing questions and possible prompts (a copy of this interview protocol can be provided on request from the corresponding author). Interviews were carried out by RP, JB, or DR, and each interview was audio-recorded with participants' permission. Initial questions engaged participants with the topic of food and experiences relating to allergy/intolerance diagnoses, adaptation, and day-to-day coping strategies. The interview then focused on participants' experiences and behaviours when eating out. Participants were encouraged to discuss strategies and environmental/social cues which influenced their decision-making processes; and to consider these preferences in relation to current and future information provision within the new legislation. Interviews lasted between 60–90 minutes.

Analyses

In order to communicate the diversity of views and perspectives surrounding participants' eating out experiences, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and explored in detail using framework analysis [25]. Framework analysis has become popular in social, policy, and

health research because it applies a systematic approach to qualitative analysis which prioritises the transparency of the analytical process; thereby maximising accessibility and strengthening confidence in subsequent results and conclusions [26, 27]. Interviews were coded and analysed using QSR NVivo (version 10). Although participants were classified based on their, or (for parents) their child's, IgE-FA or non IgE-FA/FI status, interviews were analysed across the population as a whole. The analysis was led by FMB and refined and developed in discussion with JB.

Identified themes are illustrated in results. In order to maintain anonymity, participant details are indicated in brackets as follows: A/P refers to Adult/Parent; participant number; country of residence—E = England, S = Scotland, W = Wales and NI = Northern Ireland; and food allergens associated with FA/FI responses. Italicised text reflects interviewer prompts.

Results

Participants described written food allergen information resources in terms of day to day 'use', the 'adequacy' of the information, and 'preferences' for information provision. Additional theme-based quotes are available in [S1 File](#).

Use of written information resources

Where possible, participants preferred to rely on written information in preparation for, and during, their eating out experiences. For many, particularly in relation to unfamiliar venues, written information provided the first tangible point of contact on which to base their initial food choices. Preliminary enquiries were made using venue websites to explore food options ([Box 1A](#)); and checking recipes of potential meals on the internet ([Box 1B](#)). Before committing to dine in a venue, participants gathered information about their potential food options by inspecting menus displayed in the restaurant window ([Box 1C](#)). Within the eating out venue itself, participants emphasised the role of the menu in providing detail in relation to ingredients and preparation method ([Box 1D and 1E](#)), and additional sources of written information ([Box 1F](#)).

When written information, on menus in particular, was considered to provide adequate information about ingredients and food preparation, participants reported a sense of autonomy and control when making choices. In part, this normalised the process of their food selections by allowing participants to choose their meals without recourse to additional resources. This in turn gave them greater freedom and a sense of relaxation when eating out.

Adequacy of written resources

Participants had mixed experiences in relation to the adequacy of written information resources and provided examples of good and poor practice. It was generally perceived that venues which provided more detailed allergen information would be more accommodating and caring towards FA/FI consumers ([Box 2A and 2B](#)). For some participants, the experience of poor written resources was variously a source of frustration, annoyance and anxiety; which potentially reduced their enjoyment in the entire eating out experience and caused them to avoid certain venues or eating out as a whole ([Box 2C and 2D](#)).

Preferences regarding written information provision

Within the context of the new legislation and more generally, participants had clear, though varied ideas on how best to convey allergen information in a written /visual format. As a basic principle, the overwhelming majority of respondents believed that written information

Box 1. Use of written information.

Preparation for eating out:

1. I'll look usually online—I thank God for the internet—at what their menu is. As I said, before we went to (European restaurant), I'd decided. . . I'd looked it up online and looked at their menu and gone, right, and I know I had a penne pasta dish. . . so I knew that one was going to be fine. (A14 G2 S: Milk)
2. If you're going in a few days, you can Google what the recipe is sort of thing, a rough guide, and you think, mm, that's okay, and then you just reiterate when you get there, right, I'm allergic to this. So, you know, it's just basically Googling things. . . (A39 G1 W: Peanuts, tree nuts, celery)
3. We look in the windows and we try and read, they'll put a sample menu or whatever, or outside and you try and read what kind of things are in there and if you can see that there is something that you think would be okay then it's worth a try. (P1 G1 E: Peanuts, tree nuts, milk)

In the venue:

1. . . I'd look at the menu. . . I'd sort of look at the list, oh, yeah, I like that one, and then I'd look underneath, which would tell me the ingredients, most times, with most of them, and then I'd order it. (A6 G1 E: Peanuts, tree nuts, cereals containing gluten)
2. . . it's fine because it (the menu) normally gives me, 9 times out of 10, it will tell me what's in the food. So, if I go to a restaurant and there's a fish, it will tell me how. . . it will normally say "Cooked with a white wine sauce" or cooked with whatever. It'll say how it's served. (A23 G2 NI: Milk)
3. Well pizza (chain outlet) . . . have the thing on the menu that says if you want to make sure of anything else in the ingredients, take a picture of this QR code, and if you take a picture of the QR code, it takes you to (chain outlet's) website and you can check yourself. (A33 G1 S: Peanuts, fish)

regarding food allergen content in meals should be readily available. Ideally, information provision requiring minimal effort on the part of the consumer, whilst avoiding the potential risk of reliance on staff as intermediaries in information provision, was desired ([Box 3A](#)). Expectations regarding the levels of complexity and detail for that information differed however. Many advocated the use of abbreviations or symbols ([Box 3B and 3C](#)), or a simple notification inviting further enquiries ([Box 3D](#)); whilst others appreciated more detailed allergen information provided as a section within the menu or as a separate and comprehensive written resource ([Box 3E and 3F](#)).

Although many participants requested a more detailed menu, it was also recognised that the inclusion of such detail might pose practical problems for menu presentation and readability; particularly in the case of comprehensive ingredient lists within main menus. A minority of participants also raised concerns about their own ability to identify and recognise the relevant allergens listed ([Box 3G](#)). Similar reservations in relation to the use of abbreviations/symbols as a more simplified form of allergen warning were also highlighted. Although this was a preferred method of information delivery for many, a small number of respondents raised

Box 2. Adequacy of written resources.

1. I think it was in (chain restaurant). . .they've just started doing a gluten-free burger. . .with a gluten-free bun, and they even said. . .we try our best to avoid cross-contamination. . . So, when they actually mention that, it's kind of reassuring that, oh, they actually know what they're doing. (A13 G2 W: Cereals containing gluten)
2. . . if it's clearly labelled and I don't have to be the one getting someone to search through a file or go and ask a chef. It makes a massive difference. You just feel comfortable. (A56 G1 E: Egg)
3. Very poor. . .I think they ought to provide more information. It's like they brought out that thing with calories now. They put the calories next to the menu, the meal. It's a good idea but they should do that for allergies as well. A lot of places don't do that. (P12 G2 W: Peanuts, tree nuts, milk)
4. British restaurants and those sorts of things, they just add wheat to absolutely everything, so it's impossible. . .Things like that really aggravate me, and you find, particularly in restaurants, like the list of ingredients, it's just not adequate. (A60 G1 E: Peanuts, tree nuts, cereals containing gluten)

questions relating to the consistent use of symbols across venues and countries, and the potential for confusion and accidental allergen ingestion that might result from the inconsistent application of symbols or abbreviated messages.

Verbal information resources

As an inherently social experience, participants reported that the seeking of verbal information relating to food allergens within dishes varied based on their familiarity with the eating out venue. In regularly attended venues, where a successful track record of eating out had been established over time, participants valued the feelings of confidence and relaxation which resulted from their previous interactions with helpful and accommodating staff. In unfamiliar venues, where no such prior relationships had been established and written information was judged to be incomplete, participants used a number of cues to assess the reliability of the allergen information provided by staff. Primarily, participants based these assessments on staff knowledge and more subtle perceptions of staff interest, engagement and attitude with regard to their dietary needs. Where staff knowledge ([Box 4A and 4B](#)) and demeanour ([Box 4C and 4D](#)) were deemed to be good, trust and confidence in the safety of their meal was raised. Equally, the opposite was the case when knowledge ([Box 4E and 4F](#)) and demeanour ([Box 4G and 4H](#)) was deemed to be poor.

Participants identified other factors which inspired trust or served as barriers to their perceptions of staff members as reliable information resources. Younger staff members were viewed as inherently less reliable as information resources. This was largely due to an absence of life experience, and the potential for a lack of personal investment in their appointed roles. For some, this perceived lack of reliability did not necessarily lie with young frontline staff per se, but pointed instead to a potential systemic problem relating to eating out establishments as a whole. Better training was thought to hold the key to greater levels of trust and confidence in the information provided by staff.

Box 3. Preferences for written information.

1. If you're going to be providing information, provide the information—don't make the customer go and ask for it. . . Human beings are human and they make mistakes. . . In a busy restaurant where people are talking to you, you know, you could be given the wrong information actually, so I would like that information provided in written form somehow. . . I wouldn't want to have to ask for it. (A52 G1 S: Tree nuts, cereals containing gluten)
2. . . they've got the "V" and the "N" on the menu, it would need to be a symbol-based thing, I think. . . . Because if you. . . had a particular allergy, you would just be scanning the menu for that particular symbol or letter or whatever it may be. I think that would be far more useful than having the huge long list of every ingredient. (A7 G1 E: Peanut, tree nuts)
3. All it's got to have is a GF next to it and I'm happy. Or even if it says 'not GF'. It would be better. . . I think that would be really, really useful, and if it doesn't do that then I feel like I'm a pain. (P5 G2 E: Cereals containing gluten)
4. . . if they just had a nice wee clear "We supply gluten-free" or "Ask our staff", you know, to provide a list. . . if you do have any form of intolerances, and we can leave any ingredients out or something. (A30 G3 NI: Cereals containing gluten)
5. . . the menu, that "Oh, we've got a gluten-free section," . . . that is something that they can start doing more, because some people may be embarrassed to talk about it and, you know, not. . . ask the question. (A4 G2 E: Cereals containing gluten)
6. . . they have the list on every single item in there—you know, dressings. . . sauces. . . all the allergy ingredients information, is listed on there. So. . . you know what you're getting and you know exactly what's in everything. . . and they update it as well. . . so that's brilliant. (A39 G1 W: Peanuts, tree nuts, celery)
7. I would prefer a simple description, but I have been in restaurants where. . . I'm not too sure what it means. . . They maybe list about six different ingredients and. . . I can recognise so many of them, and some of them, I'm not too sure about. (A20 G1 NI: Peanuts, tree nuts)

Whilst a minority of participants sought verbal information as a safety clarification in addition to written information resources, the majority reported a sense of reluctance and embarrassment when making enquiries of staff. Although asking questions of staff was seen as a necessity by many participants; for others the perceived embarrassment of asking staff for further information led to self-imposed limitations in food selections, or unnecessary risk taking.

Discussion

Written information of sufficient quality was used as a baseline resource which liberated FA/FIs to make their food selections independently and without recourse to other information seeking strategies. Beyond the written resource itself, FA/FIs inferred a wider message of 'understanding' on the part of venues that provided adequate written allergen information, and were reassured by notices encouraging customers to ask staff about the allergen content of foods. This implied awareness gave FA/FIs permission to ask questions of staff with the

Box 4. Staff knowledge and demeanour.

1. The (Asian restaurant), as I said, they done gluten-free. They were able to offer an alternative to soy sauce and everything. So, she was able to say, 'Well, you can't have noodles but you can have rice noodles.' So, she was actually more knowledgeable than me on coeliac, so that was good. (A48 G2 S: Cereals containing gluten)
2. (Sandwich chain) are usually quite good because I . . . went to one a couple of years ago now, and I said, "Oh can I have that, but I'm allergic to cucumbers so you're going to have to completely. . ." you know, and she said, "Well, that's cut in the same machine, so you can't have that." So, they kind of know. . . what's cut what and what's doing what. So, (Sandwich chain) are quite good for knowing what's in the products and stuff. (A39 G1 W: Peanuts, tree nuts, celery)
3. You get some people that are quite perky and cheery and. . . Also, asking specifically as well. . . So, I'd say, like I might accidentally say "No milk" and they'd be like "Do you also not want cheese?" or "No prawns" and they're like, "Are you okay with.?" you know, this other thing. So, you know, you get some people that are quite on the ball in that sense. (A11 G1 S: Milk, Crustaceans)
4. . . if a waiter is really keen on like listening and just writing all the ingredients, just to make sure she speaks or he speaks to the chef. So, yeah, just basically communication and the way they treat those things. (A9 G1 E)
5. The trust is in the staff, to begin with. I mean, they're your first contact, aren't they? If they have knowledge of the food, then I'm quite confident. If they have no knowledge of the food, then I think I'm not coming here again. (A18 G3 E: Milk)
6. Some do say, "What do you mean, dairy, what do you mean?" and I say cream, cheese, milk, anything like that, and. . . what makes me laugh, people think I'm going to be allergic to mayonnaise because it's from the eggs, and. . . I said, "Actually, it's not dairy, even though it's from the hen, it's not dairy, it's not a cow. . ." (A26 G2 E: Milk)
7. There's been times in the past when I know. . . I can read people, and I know that they're thinking "Oh, for God's sake, this is a fad!" sort of thing, you know, and it's not good enough. (A18 G3 E: Milk)
8. I've had them just shrug their shoulders and say "I don't know." "Well, does the chef know?" "I don't think he will," you know, sort of thing. . . and you're thinking, you're joking. . . ! (A53 G2 E: Cereals containing gluten)

expectation of an informed response; and without fear of embarrassment. At its best, accurate and trustworthy food allergen information delivered verbally by staff also enhanced FA/FI's eating out experience. Judgements regarding the potential for accidental exposure to food allergens were contingent on subtle social cues suggestive of staff knowledge; and were assessed by FA/FIs accordingly. Where doubts surrounding verbal allergen information occurred, FA/FIs retreated to their default position of reliance on written information resources, and in turn limited the potential variety of venues and food options available to them as a result. However, with adequate written allergen information, and the positive interactions of reliable allergen-aware staff; FA/FIs experienced an increase in trust and loyalty to eating out/takeaway venues concerned.

Fundamental to FA/FI's concerns surrounding allergen information provision when eating out, was the need for constant vigilance to ensure allergen avoidance, balanced against a wish to avoid 'drawing attention' [16]. EU FIC (1169/2011) legislation has the potential to address these issues by making the provision of food allergen information mandatory, thereby validating and normalising food allergies and intolerances. By empowering FA/FIs with the right to ask and expect adequate information provision, it is to be hoped that the latter fear of embarrassment and resultant social isolation will be reduced [14, 17].

Given that strict allergen avoidance is necessary for many FA/FIs [28, 18] and the risk of food allergen exposure when eating out is high [4], our research indicates that FA/FIs clearly have no coherent set of preferences for the delivery of allergen information within an eating out setting. At its best, legislators should aim to cater for this diversity of preferences by recommending a combination of written and face to face allergen information provision to accommodate the varying needs and preferences of FA/FI populations. Food providers can play a crucial role in meeting FA/FI's needs through the provision of clear written allergen information, increased allergen-awareness training for staff, and effective communication mechanisms between food preparation and serving areas. Alongside written information, our results indicate that staff use of simple, proactive face to face strategies to make enquiries and reassure customers, is favoured by FA/FIs. For example, training staff to ask diners about any food sensitivities from the outset, would convey allergen awareness, and would likely diminish much of reticence exhibited by FA/FIs within this study and in wider literature [14, 16].

In recognising the insights gained through the in-depth analysis of FA/FIs information preferences when eating out, we also acknowledge the limitations of the study. Given that we were seeking to understand the perspectives of those with both FA and FI it was necessary to use self-report measures to assess FA/FI status. Although this was done through the careful application of strict symptom-based FA/FI criteria; the assignment of some participants presented a challenge. However accuracy of allocation was less critical within the remit of the current study which sought a broader perspective on FA/FI populations' preferences for written and/or verbal food allergen information when eating out. Due to the qualitative nature of our research we were also unable to account for the impact of demographic factors such as sex, age and region of residence within the UK. These factors may have affected FA/FI's preferences in terms of allergen information provision and willingness to communicate with staff.

Conclusion

In light of EU legislation requiring that eating out providers supply consumers with information regarding the allergen content of their foods, this study is the first to gain in-depth insights into FA/FI consumers' preferences for the provision of allergen information when eating out or ordering takeaway foods. Findings indicate that FA/FI consumers were often ambivalent or conflicted in their preferences for written and verbal allergen information provision. FA/FIs overwhelmingly favoured tangible, written information in the first instance; and adequate written information often led to an implicit trust in subsequent verbal information. Where written information was limited, FA/FIs depended on social cues to assess the reliability of verbal information resources, and defaulted to tried and tested allergen avoidance strategies when these were deemed unreliable. Understanding the subtle negotiations and difficulties encountered by FA/FIs when eating out can serve as a guide for legislators and food providers; by encouraging the provision of clear written and verbal allergen information, and the training of proactive, allergen aware staff. This, in tandem with legally enforceable requirements for food allergen information provision provided by the EU legislation, paves the way for FA/FIs to feel more confident in their eating out choices; and to experience a safer eating out experience.

Supporting Information

S1 File. Additional theme-based quotes from interviews.
(DOCX)

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Author Contributions

Conceived and designed the experiments: JB MHG JSL. Performed the experiments: JB RP DR FMB. Analyzed the data: FMB JB. Wrote the paper: FMB JB. Provided advice as an allergic consumer to the project throughout: MHG. Provided clinical expertise as an allergist to the project throughout: JSL. Contributed to reviewing and commenting on early drafts of the paper: MHG JSL RP DR. Conceived and designed the project: JB MHG JSL. Collected the data: RP JB DR. Analyzed the data: FMB JB. Wrote the paper: FMB JB. Approved the manuscript for submission: FMB JB RP DR MHG JSL. Agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved: FMB JB RP DR MHG JSL.

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S1 File: Additional theme-based quotes from interviews

Use of written information

<Internals\\A1 G3 E> -

Again, the descriptions are...sometimes, they're okay. Other times, they're very vague, and it's those ones that then I think, oh, what am I going to do now?! You know, I don't know whether to phone them and say, you know, before I go, because then I've spoken to them, they don't know who I am because I don't give my name, and then, when I go, they won't say "Oh, you were the guy that phoned up..."! Yeah, so, yeah, I try and...I try and do that if it's not as informative as it could be, and very often they're not, they're not at all. They don't say, em...sometimes they do, but very often not "with a creamy sauce" – it just says "served with chips" and that's no good to me, you know. Yeah.

<Internals\\A11 G1 S>

I think, by default, I know that I can eat in most places, apart from maybe Italian, and I'd be guaranteed to find something that I can eat. So, I think I would mostly just check menus if a friend had recommended it and said "Do you want to come to this place?" and I wanted to check the price, and maybe, you know, if they hadn't described it, maybe check if, you know, if it wasn't Italian – that really is my cut-off point. Or a shellfish restaurant!

<Internals\\A12 G3 S>

I mean, it's getting bad up here in (place name) when you eat out, but so far, I've managed to get away with it, but I find now, when I'm going down South, it's getting harder, and if we go out eating with my son and his wife, and maybe go to places, like we were at (place name) the other...in (month), and we ate down there, and that was okay. Then we went to somewhere else which wasn't – it had spicy things in it....

<Internals\\A13 G2 W>

Yeah, I'd go to the menu, and if I can't see anything that specifically says gluten-free or GF or like separates it from the rest, I'd just eat something that I know for a fact is gluten-free just because it is, like a natural food like a potato or fish or...

<Internals\\A16 G1 E>

Well, I think the first thing...I think the first point of contact is look at the menu. You know, if you sort of look at it and you think, right, it's chicken korma, so you think, right, well, I know what goes into a korma, and it's chicken.

<Internals\\A17 G3 E>

Em, mainly the menu and then ask. Sometimes it's not much use asking the waitress or a waiter, if they're a young person, but if you can get somebody that's sort of near the chef or...you can ask them.

<Internals\\A18 G3 E>

I'd look at the menu, and then...and then I'll look at the board to see what's on, and then, if there's something that I prefer from the board, I would ask the staff what's in that....Oh, definitely, definitely look at the menu, yeah, yeah. If it says with a sauce or a marinade, then no, no. Even if it...if it's a specific dish that comes with a sauce or a marinade, I usually say "Can you please leave off the marinade or the sauce?"

<Internals\\A19 G2 NI>

Em, yeah, sometimes, places that I know have gluten-free, that I've looked up or researched or have had to make a phone call or email them before I would even go. I wouldn't really...I wouldn't very often do it spontaneously when I'm out and just decide to go out or to new places that I don't know if they have it or not, because I find that annoying, going round all the different places and finding out that they don't have very much... I had to just do my research in advance, so I just looked up on the internet before we went out anywhere and we just...we found that place, so they had gluten-free options. So, I went there and they had...they had very good options and they understood and everything, so they were able to give me, you know...

<Internals\\A22 G1 NI>

Check on the internet, look on my smartphone and get them to point me through to something that looked suitable.

<Internals\\A23 G2 NI>

If we were planning to go for dinner, yeah, we'd have a look. We'd look online and see where there is in the area for dinner, and kind of that thing, because you'd ring and book. So, we would probably more than likely do that. If we were in the town down there, let's say you went [down to the south] even and you're going shopping or whatever, just probably you just go look round town and see what's in the town or what kind of looks right or what kind of menus look like they're....Just eh...if it was somewhere I didn't know, I would just go online and kind of be like what area are we in..., what's around this area? And...you get, like (website name), they have restaurant advisor meals. If I was in that situation, that's what I'd do. I'd go by general consensus of 8 out of 10 people think this place is okay – right, we'll go there, I'll get it from there.

<Internals\\A24 G1 NI> -

First of all, it would be by the style of restaurant, I'd feel, if there's....if they serve the types of food that I would usually eat, I would go there, and then I would ask them, as soon as you go in then, if they're... Usually, if they're not happy, they'll tell you [laughing]. They won't be slow in saying.

Look at the menu, yeah. Sometimes, if it's a new restaurant, I'd phone them, you know. If I'm going with a group, I would generally phone them and see rather than having to go the whole way there and get told you can't...there's nothing suitable.

Usually look at the menu and look at something that you would feel most...most confident with. Quite often, I would ask for, generally, without the salad because, quite often, it comes with coleslaw, which is mayonnaise in it or salad cream, and if that touches, you know, sometimes that can be enough. So, quite often, I just get quite plain, plain dishes, and I'd ask, you know, generally I'd ask about any sauces that I wasn't familiar with.

<Internals\\A27 G1 W>

Well, when you go into a restaurant or a café, is there a notice there that says, you know, we do use peanuts, something along that line, or something to say, well, "If you've got a peanut allergy, please ask questions", which you never, ever see anywhere.

<Internals\\A28 G1 W>

Well, if we go somewhere, we always tell in advance, when we're booking, we've got a member...well, me, member of the family that's... People are really, generally, very good.

<Internals\\A29 G3 S>

So, yeah, I will definitely check menus and stuff online, and especially going anywhere with my (parents), I would be quite scrupulous about that because I feel my (parent is) more sensitive....Places normally have a menu in the window, to check before you go in so that you're not looking like an eejit.

So, but again, the pre-checking thing, I'm never going to just drop in to a high-end restaurant. I'm not moving in those circles where that would be an option. So, if I'm going somewhere that would be considered high-end, it will have been a pre-considered, researched, menus checked online...

<Internals\\A3 G3 E>

If I could go in somewhere – first of all, if I went in somewhere and it said... If the menu is on the wall and said up there that it was sort of dairy-free or, you know, then you wouldn't mind asking somebody, but if it's not then...

<Internals\\A31 G1 S>

No, I mean, we would just, like anybody else, just look at the menu, either online or in the window, and then look at the prices, decide whether we were going to go, and the nut allergy conversation would happen inside.

<Internals\\A32 G2 S>

If we were somewhere else in the UK, I would probably, em, I would probably stick to the kind of, you know, nationwide chains that I know are going to have a different variety, just to be sure maybe. You know, if there's not, I'll just...I'll risk it and just have something boring

I think there's a lot of information about, especially because, you know, you can look it up. You can look at these things online, and I get a lot of things sent to me as well from Coeliac UK, so I feel like there's a lot of information for me, and as well for other people that have, you know, kind of similar food allergies.

<Internals\\A35 G1 W>

Em...well, you'd have a look at the menu outside first and see if I fancy anything there, and that that hasn't got any allergy affecting me, I'd go in.

<Internals\\A38 G3 W>

I'll look at the menu, and I'll have, you know, I'll have a look, and then, like I say, if I'm not sure, then I will ask. Or I'll stick to something that I know, you know, that I think...because...I don't know, because, you know, it is sort of...you do feel that, if you're asking things, that you're being sort of a bit awkward.

<Internals\\A42 G3 W>

Yeah, you'd have to totally scrutinise the menu to try and... And again, yeah, you end up asking as well, you do end up asking them, because sometimes they don't...you know, I can imagine they don't put all the ingredients, so you do have to end up checking, which isn't ideal.

<Internals\\A43 G1 S>

I'm a menu-looker, yeah. Unless...unless I'm particularly... I'm thinking about (city), unless I'm particularly drawn into somewhere that just looks good... You can usually in (city) because, if there's lots of people, it's good, and if there isn't and there's... My rule of thumb is, if someone's serving food and they've got pictures of the food in laminate, walk the other way.

That's usually my rule of thumb. I'm a menu-reader though. If something grabs me on the menu... Being vegetarian as well, I'm usually limited for choice. If I see something on the menu, that would usually pull me in the door more than the sort of ambience look of the place.

<Internals\\A44 G1 E (G2 instead)>

A lot of the times, they have a menu outside now, these places, so you can kind of view it before you go in,

<Internals\\A46 G2 E>

I'm going to try, yeah, I'm going to try and see if they've got a website. It seems to be like an independent. I don't think it's part of a chain. But I'll look on their website and see if they've got one and see if I can have a look at the menu. I've not eaten in there before. So, em, that tends to be what I do if I know where I'm going.

<Internals\\A39 G1 W>

Yeah, yeah, just look where you're going – ooh, that looks nice [laughing], kind of plan what we're having to eat before you even get there!

<Internals\\P2 G1 E>

Enough for me to decide whether its somewhere we could go. I'd probably look into it a little bit more. If he said can we go to a (restaurant type) I'd probably say ok, I'd already have an idea of whether its somewhere we could go. And then if it did come up, then I'd probably make a bit more of an informed decision. Go and have a look to find out a little bit more.

<Internals\\A30 G3 NI>

Oh, (search engine), obviously, and have a look, and hopefully word of mouth, you know, but I think there is quite a good wee directory going on sort of on that system, you know, for that (self-help organisation) anyway. You can actually put into them, you know, and they'll give you a list of different restaurants and things in the local area.

<Internals\\A25 G1 E>

Em, probably the website. I'd ask the staff, usually the manager, just to be sure. And the menu I suppose, yeah...

<Internals\\A35 G1 W>

No, it's just have a look at the menu and then, em, usually, the menus, they say what's in the menu, and then I'm quite happy. If I'm not, well, I will ask the staff.

<Internals\\A40 G1 W>

Have a look at the menu and then go in and ask them, because if there is something that I like on the menu, then they might be able to cook it without nuts or whatever in, so yeah.

<Internals\\P6 G1 S>

I'm a big Internet lover, I like to check things out. I do look at menus beforehand, some menus will say if it's got something in it, others won't. But you're always going to take a gamble. I think we do play safe.

Written information preferences

Signs & symbols

<Internals\\A10 G3 S>

I think they produce their own things, so it shouldn't be too hard. They'll just have to sort of bring in a system in place that, whoever it is they get it from – I mean, I think it's done specially for them – will just have to tell them what's in it. And as for producing a little sign, I don't think that will be too hard, and there'll be a slight, you know, extra expense, but I don't think it's going to be that hard for them.... I mean, they already have the little V symbols for vegetarian, so I imagine they'd just put something in like that, and they might, you know, put a little "C" for coeliac-friendly or something. Yeah.

<Internals\\A13 G2 W>

.the second I see like a key, like along with the V, vegetarian sign, if there's like there NGCI, so no gluten in any ingredients, if I see that, or if I see GF for gluten-free, and if I can clearly see that key at the bottom, and then it related to certain meals on the menu, that's when I feel completely fine, like they've taken the time to make it apparent what I can eat, or, even better, if there's a separate gluten-free menu.

<Internals\\A15 G1 E>

I can use the internet now and find other people who have these allergies, and say why don't we have an icon where, immediately, you can see if one of these is in there, because there's a picture of something on the front of the package, so I can immediately see that it's got one of those things. It might be one of several different colours or there might be several different icons, the same way as if you, you know, if you buy a film or a game, if it's not suitable for kids, it will have a 15 or 18 on it, and then you know, that that's got content that's not suitable for children. I want to immediately, on the front, front and...not necessarily centre, but see an icon immediately, and I know that, okay, I need to be aware.

<Internals\\A19 G2 NI>

A lot of the menus could have, you know, wee gluten-free symbols beside things, you know, to help people like that, but they don't so it's quite hard really....So I think that would be helpful. Because (place name), on their menu, it has a wee "G" or a "V" beside things and then I know that that's gluten-free, so then it's easier for me. And whenever they label that, it's easier, on the menu. It just makes it nicer for me.

<Internals\\A22 G1 NI>

Certainly, it should...there should be warning, some sort of standard warning that you can just very, very quickly look at whatever it is, whether it be a packet of food in the supermarket or on the menu as you go into a restaurant, if there's something, a warning there that is general to everyone, and as soon as you look at that, you can recognise it. I don't think we're in...we've got up to that level where it's easy to see those warnings, so how you can improve them, who knows, but there must be better ways of giving people the information.

<Internals\\A23 G2 NI>

I'm full-on with that, but I don't see why, if we're doing a menu, like say that's your two lines containing thing, why down here, with a star beside it, can't you just put down in green writing, which everybody knows means it's in the food, nuts, peanuts, fish, eggs, celery, so people know we're looking at, okay, that already has...

<Internals\\A24 G1 NI>

Some of them would just say, you know, "Some of our products may contain nuts", but then, em, quite often, especially in the last few years I've found, you know, beside each individual dish, they'd have an N for nuts or... I find nuts, more than eggs, the labelling is better for nuts.

<Internals\\A29 G3 S>

Well, one of the kind of helpful things is when they do the wee symbols, you know, for each option, like the wee "I" or whatever...If they do that, it just immediately alerts you, and even if it's just a wee bit down at the bottom says, "V" mean, and this means, and that means...Yeah. That's what I would expect. And it wouldn't be difficult to make up a code for that and include that.

<Internals\\A30 G3 NI>

Oh, something actually on there, even a symbol or something to say that, you know, if you do have a gluten or whatever problem, just speak to us, you know, to sort of like arrange for that to be...because, again, you know, if you've [good, straight] foods and products and stuff, you can't mess with it, do you know, and you can actually, if you don't have a milk allergy or something, have quite a few, you know, ingredients that are in things, but if it's actually saying we are perhaps friendly and sympathetic to this, you know....I don't want to be putting...bothering people, I just want to see. I want it to be bold and I want it to be frank, you know, and there's just like a wee cross that just says it, you know, wheat, you know. There is a symbol. There's symbols on everything for it, and that's what I would like to see down the side of the menu because then you'd go, okay, number 32, you know. I don't know, yeah, yeah...

<Internals\\A34 G2 W>

I find they're quite peanut-aware now, but it seems to be like, em, nut allergies have taken over, and it's just a nut allergy. I actually don't like nuts anyway, but that's the only thing.... You think, oh, like peanut allergy or...that's it, really. And although you do get lots of signs on menus, it takes you an age to work out what the blinking signs are.

<Internals\\A44 G1 E (G2 instead)>

You know how you see like the little V saying it's vegan or vegetarian, whichever one they decide to use it for, the same – they could a sign, just if it's got this sign, it means it will contain dairy. Because dairy, if you want to generalise, and if it was your choice or not, if you wanted to be a vegan, or if you were like me and won't eat it because of your health, you know, that is still the same answer, isn't it?

<Internals\\A46 G2 E>

Like, some of the menus will have gluten-free, but if there was, em - you know, if you look at a menu and it has a big green V, you know it's vegetarian. That's kind of a, you know, used across the board. I've seen things with a little circle with a wheat, bit of wheat, with a cross in it, em, somewhere, and then somewhere else where they just write GF next to it. So, if there was like a nationally-recognised symbol that you could put, that would be okay. You know, some places, the information is good; some, some not, but I think, as a generalisation, not very good really.

<Internals\\A48 G2 S>

No, I never trust symbols, ever, no matter what restaurant you're in. I just never trust it. The food might be gluten-free, but again, it could be contaminated.

<Internals\\A49 G1 E>

Em, yeah, I think probably, like if you were...especially, you know, on the front of the menu, because you tend to order takeaways from a menu, that you've got a kind of paper one, and I think, if they had like symbols and signs or like some sort of...that would definitely, you know... I'd be able to try different types of sushi to what I always go for and, em, yeah, I think, with takeaway menus, that would be really helpful.

<Internals\\A53 G2 E>

But there's very few restaurants put "gluten-free" on. I think (pub chain) is the only one that I've come across that actually actively put "gluten-free" on. It's in like a little bar, green bar, and it'll say "gluten-free".

You can see it, you know. If it's got something the size of this, you know, "gluten-free", just a little label, "gluten-free", people will learn where to look for it, and they catch on, and it's unobtrusive, and you can make a decision without anybody ever knowing that you're gluten-intolerant.

<Internals\\A57 G2 E>

And you've got your little coeliac sign, so I don't really know why that can't be put against things, so somebody who is gluten-free would think, right, I can...I don't need to ask in front of everybody, I can just go down it...

<Internals\\A58 G1 E>

On all menus, it should just say what has nuts in and what doesn't have nuts in....So, for example, if it's got gluten in, for a coeliac person, then it says "G", like for a vegetarian has a "V", and for a nut allergy, it should have an "N", something like that, something very straightforward which people understand.

<Internals\\A59 G1 S>

Em, I guess it would be helpful if they just had a little sign next to items on the menu that have nuts in, but, I don't know, I manage. It's fine.

<Internals\\A6 G1 E>

I think pubs do that a bit more, if I'm thinking right. (pub chain) have got that on there. Yeah, em, could probably be more visible, but then so could the "V" I suppose, for vegan – you know, how big do they make these things for people? But of course, I mean, it's great, I think, if they're telling you, but I don't want it to tell me that it may have nuts – I just want nuts or no nuts, do you know...I think they do quite well. Like I said, they've got it on the menus. If there's nuts in ingredients, it's listed. Some of them have the symbols, and you've also got the...at the counters, you've got the labels that tell you. They could probably do a little bit more in terms of the boards and things like that – could they not put the "N" next to it and stuff there when they're writing it up?

<Internals\\A7 G1 E>

because if you were...had a particular allergy, you would just be scanning the menu for that particular symbol or letter or whatever it may be. I think that would be far more useful than having the huge long list of every ingredient.

<Internals\\P12 G1 W(51)>

I don't see why they can't put it... you have the vegans, they've got the V, so perhaps if they had some sort of symbols or something next to it so you can see from there because at the bottom of their menu it says what it all stands for, whether it's vegetarian or ... I think it's got peanut allergies on the one in (restaurant chain), and they've got all different symbols, and the symbols then are down the bottom. I think that's fine

<Internals\\P15 G2 S>

We have a menu and then go up. I guess it would be the same, if you had a central list you could ask on the phone or when you go in. But the main menu that you get delivered has this sort of key, dairy free or gluten free, named ones....

<Internals\\P3 G1 E>

Just to have a little mark or little thing just to say oh yeah it does contain, you know.

<Internals\\P9 G1 NI>

You know how things say 'contains nuts', say there was a colour coded, and the red dot meant it contained wheat, one containing dairy. Those sorts of things, you're not going to have to write out a list of ingredients because for some places that just would not be viable. You'd be reading 20 pages of a menu like a wine list. So some sort of colour code, like on toothpaste, like the square coding on the back of the tooth paste? That would be a system that would say 'there's dairy in that, stay away from that'. And if there's just the lactose and no dairy in it or if there was just the dairy, those sort of things, a wee colour coded system.

Separate menu / menu section

<Internals\\P15 G2 S>

We have a menu and then go up. I guess it would be the same, if you had a central list you could ask on the phone or when you go in. But the main menu that you get delivered has this sort of key, dairy free or gluten free, named ones....

<Internals\\A11 G1 S>

I'm so used to looking on the back of products and being able to go, okay, well, that's dairy, that's...you know...and some places will even obviously have it in a separate section, you know, and that's really handy. Restaurants are generally pretty bad.

<Internals\\A31 G1 S>

I mean, it would be just much better if every ingredient was labelled there on the menu, or on a separate sheet to the menu and they can bring it to you and you can have a look for yourself. I'd rather that than bothering other people with it.

<Internals\\A36 G2 W>

Maybe have a section where you can have something to eat without...telling you dairy-free, gluten-free, or whatever, yeah.

<Internals\\A45 G1 W>

But if they did, put underneath what the, you know, think of what people's allergies could be and say that there is this, that or the other that is in there, you know what I mean, and people would know then to avoid it, you know.

<Internals\\A46 G2 E>

Yeah, it was a book, em, of all their dishes, everything – like it would have, I don't know, so-and-so, and then each component of the dish and whether it had any allergens or anything like that in it. So, I was able to go down and see, so I had a choice, which was lovely, of what I could have, and that was really helpful. I haven't been back – obviously don't live there.

<Internals\\A56 G1 E>

It would be amazing if people could have just an extra page on the menu that you could just go to because when you go into a restaurant, sometimes... I mean, I was hopeless before. I couldn't, you know, make a decision before I knew there was anything wrong, when I could have everything, or I thought I could, but they're so vast, so you're faced with a vast amount of choice, which you think, you know, what do I want, ooh, I want that, I want that, I want that, and then you think can I have that, and then it goes. If there was just an extra page that just had, you know, like "Safe for weirdos" [laughing], a page at the back, or they had an allergy board....it doesn't have to be all-singing, all-dancing. It's just...just information, em, with like a little paperclip or something just on the top, just so that you, you know, you're not taking the time to say it and say it and say it.

<Internals\\A57 G2 E>

We were in (city), in a restaurant there, and they produced a gluten-free menu, which I thought, wow, yeah! That was the (restaurant name), in (city). There, they actually had their own personal gluten-free menu, which was wow!

<Internals\\A8 G2 E>

Because I know, em, actually, at (coffee shop chain), they started to introduce a menu that had the different things in and the intolerances, but I don't know where that's gone now, because it was, for a few months, they started to have it in – they had all the calories, and they had how much dairy in, whether it was vegetarian, whether it was whatever, and that was at (coffee shop chain). It was a foldout menu, but I haven't seen it now for [a good year].

<Internals\\P11 G1 W>

If it was plain and simple, if you could understand what they mean and things, I'm not saying it takes over the whole menu, but it is written in a small box or something at the bottom of the menu and explains whatever, you know I wouldn't ask so many questions on the food, or so many questions in a restaurant, it's bound to save some time and energy and whatever. But if it was more detailed, especially with the people who've got more severe allergies than (child's name), especially the nuts and the strawberries and so on, especially for them.....I

think it'd be brilliant. They've got little boxes here with the children's choice and they should put allergens, a little box like that.

<Internals\\P12 G1 W(51)>

....we know the menus and it's easier to find. Because we're used to the menus, you know, you get used to just looking for the allergy section....It's similar to the big one but it's a lot smaller and it's got the vegans and it's just got the milk intolerance. It's got everything on them lines, but it's half the size of their normal menu, so the variety is not as good. It is good, but (child) orders the same thing every time.

<Internals\\P3 G1 E>

On the – yeah on the menu. If you order a take away either on line or on the menu if you have one obviously from the other take aways. I mean yeah I suppose on the menu, just underneath. You know whatever they're sort of stating they could just have a little section. I think some of them do.

<Internals\\P5 G2 E> - § 3 references coded [1.05% Coverage]

So I asked them if they did anything and they actually came out, the waiters and waitresses have got a book a bit like what you're holding there, everything listed and what's in it. And they can actually say 'yes that hasn't got that in'.

<Internals\\P6 G1 S>

With (restaurant chain) again they have a very good junior section, a very detailed menu, they are very family orientated, it can be a bit noisy, especially in (restaurant chain), sometimes it's families galore!

Positive interactions with staff

<Internals\\A12 G3 S>

I would ask the waiting staff, and if they don't know, I would expect them to ask the chef. A lot of them do say "Oh, I'm not sure about that, I'll ask the chef for you." Others are quite, you know, they're quite knowledgeable and they know what's in it and they explain, especially in the likes of, say, (coffee shop chain) in (place name), the (restaurant). All their waiting staff all know what's in what.

<Internals\\A13 G2 W>

I think I feel most comfortable, definitely, when... Like I went to (pizza restaurant chain) this weekend and they give you a separate slate that's different to everyone else's pizzas and your own cutter, so then I know...I know that it's fine because I'm doing it myself. And I just panic like...just the silliest things, like what if they give my gluten-free dish to someone else and give me theirs!

There was a bit of...she had a reaction because they'd given her something wrong. So, that as bad, but then she emailed and told the manager about it and they said, right, they apologised profusely, and were like, when you come back, tell us you're coming back and we'll make sure your experience is much better. We actually went back about two weeks ago, and she explained this is me from before, bad experience, and you told me to let you know if I was coming back – I'm back. And it was like, right, and there was a huge wait for tables, but they gave us a table straightaway. We got to speak to one of the higher staff, like with the manager, who knew more about it. She took our order and she was like, right, we'll make sure there is no cross-contamination. She mentioned that, which was a big...you know, they sent over a waitress who had an experience herself and knew a family member with it, so then obviously we felt more comfortable because we were speaking to someone who'd experienced it themselves. So, that was good.

<Internals\\A14 G2 S>

(Supermarket deli). The food, I know, is made fresh, and they ask me – this was the part, they ask "Do you want cheese on that?" No. They ask you. They don't ask you out of kindness, they ask you because they charge you more for it, but it's the fact they ask me, and they tell me if...not because [?], but if, for example, they've run out of butter or margarine, they'll say "Oh, we're using margarine instead of butter," or... They're quite specific at this one.

<Internals\\A19 G2 NI>

And then the (name) Hotel in (place name), I was at a wedding there and told them I was gluten-free, and then, when I arrived, the man came over and asked me if I was the gluten-free, because the bride had pointed me out, and then he got me a nice starter and things, and the dinner and offered me pavlova for dessert and things, apart from fruit, because I said I couldn't have fruit, so they dealt with that quite well.

<Internals\\A2 G1 E>

So I did go and – when he came over, “Do you have that?” and he was like “Oh, I’m not sure – to be honest with you, sometimes it seems we do and sometimes we don’t,” and I imagine it happens like that in a kitchen. But he went and spoke to the chef and just made perfectly sure or said “Would it be okay not to do it?” and he even came back with more information than needed. He went, “Oh, she can’t guarantee it hasn’t touched...been in a nut environment, and she says, you know...” blah-blah-blah, which is fine because he could have just went, “No, it’s not coming with nuts.” He went the extra mile and he was actually clear and I was, oh, that’s fine, that’s fine, and I got my cake! So, yeah, that was very good.

<Internals\\A21 G3 NI>

Yeah, because there’s plenty of times we’ve said that and they’ve come over and said, right, such-and-such, you know, it’s been done that way – is that okay for you?

<Internals\\A28 G1 W>

They’ll tell you what to avoid, or they’ll cook it from scratch for you, which I’ve known to...it has been done....Yes. You know, they don’t take offence when you ask! Most of them are quite nice, but they know.

<Internals\\A3 G3 E>

Em, well, if you ask them and they...they’re pretty helpful, not...not over-the-top helpful, but if they don’t know, they’ll say, “Oh, I’ll just check.” You know, like with the (Asian restaurant), you know, “It’s not done with yoghurt, is it, and it’s not done with cream?” and they say, you know, no, and, “Oh, hang on a minute...” and what makes – I do like it if they say, “Oh, hang on, I’ll just check.” Because they could say, “No, it’s not,” you know, and I think, well, if they’re just checking, they are taking an interest...

<Internals\\A31 G1 S>

These sort of places, I would...I would tell them at the beginning because I know that the service is so good and they’re so sort of knowledgeable about their food that it wouldn’t be an issue at all, and they’re really just happy to...to help.

<Internals\\A38 G3 W>

I think, because I’ve been going, you know, I’ve been going to, you know, like the [venue name], I’d been going there because I became intolerant, so I know the staff and things, so I know that they will cater... If I say, “Oh, please,” you know, they’ll be like “Of course!” So, I don’t feel that I’m sort of putting them out or anything because I sort of...I know them on a personal level.

<Internals\\A39 G1 W>

(Sandwich chain) are usually quite good because I’ve been...went to one years a couple of years ago now, and I said, “Oh can I have that, but I’m allergic to so you’re going to have to completely...” you know, and she said, “Well, that’s cut in the same machine, so you can’t have that.” So, they kind of know what’s...what’s cut what and what’s doing what. So, Subway are quite good for knowing what’s in the products and stuff.

<Internals\\A4 G2 E>

But if someone was proactive in sort of saying, you know, here’s the menu today, we’ve got this, we’ve got that, and it’s got a gluten-free section, it may make those people with gluten-free...oh, fair enough, that’s quite good, I’ll look at that. Em...so I suppose the confidence of knowing what’s in the food and how it’s prepared and all that sort of stuff, I suppose...

<Internals\\A40 G1 W>

I’ve found that they’ve been really helpful. If they aren’t sure, they usually do go and ask. They usually ask the cook.

<Internals\\A41 G1 W>

If they looked like they were enjoying their jobs and they looked like... If was someone was just like saying to you like, "Oh yeah, what do you want to order?" or do they look like they actually wanted to serve you and wanted you to ask questions really...

<Internals\\A43 G1 S>

As I said, because I find, if you just ask, they seem to change things for you, most places.

<Internals\\A45 G1 W>

I might say "Is there cream with that? Is there custard with it?" is there this, is there that, you know, what... I've even had them come up, bringing a piece out to me to show me

<Internals\\A49 G1 E>

"Oh, but can I have this, but not with this?" or, you know, something, that I have these kind of special requests, that it's just like "Em, okay then..." You know, I like to be like "Of course, absolutely!" If they are like very open to that, then I think that's somewhere, you know, I enjoy – I have an enjoyable experience being at.

<Internals\\A5 G2 E>

Yeah, I would ask them, but I...depending on how they react, their answers, is how much I believe them, because, you know, you can say does that have something in it and they go "Oh no!" or "Oh yes!" and they know, but if they say, "Oh, I don't know, I'll have to check with the chef," and all that, you think, well, you should know the answer to that really, if you work here, you know. So, em, yeah, I'd always ask them and then see what their answer is, if I trust them or not

<Internals\\A50 G2 E>

I'm probably more prepared to take the word of the food provider. I mean, an example of that was, on Saturday, we went up to the contemporary craft festival, and there was a vegan/vegetarian stall there, and she said "Everything here is gluten-free, except for the cakes in this...some of the cakes here." And I thought, oh, that's great...So kind of...yes, knowledge that's demonstrated by their people in the café or restaurant or whatever it might be.

I think the provenance of food, the integrity and the authenticity of food is...it's mattering to people I think a lot more. So I think that's something that also informs my sense of whether I trust somebody or not. So, if I can go in and...like...a little bit like that place at the craft festival on Saturday, you know, I think I bought into her, my sense of her integrity about what she was doing, that she seemed knowledgeable, she seemed, you know...

<Internals\\A52 G1 S>

... you know, the kind of place where you know exactly that the chef is going to be able to do what it is that you want or help you avoid something, and where the waiter is going to know what – you know, if you say "Is there something in this?" he's going to know and not have to sort of shuffle off and ask, you know, sort of supervisors and things.

I was looking for something really un-spicy, you know, was staying away from wheat and things, and they said, you know, "Don't worry, you know, we'll make it as spicy as you want, and if you say you just want mild, mild, mild, that's what we do," kind of thing, so, "And there's no wheat in any of our sauces" and things, so, em, yeah, that would be probably the type of place I would go.

<Internals\\A56 G1 E>

I was out with my mum, and she had said, you know, we'll go for a scone, and I was like, oh, I can't have a scone, and I just said, "Oh, it doesn't matter, I'll have whatever," a biscuit or whatever, and then she said, "You know, these don't look like they're glazed mind, because they're just really pale," and she said, "Oh well, I'll ask," and I was like, "Oh, you know, don't bother," but she did, and they said, "Oh, no, no, we don't glaze them. We do with the cheese ones, but not the fruit ones – there's no egg at all in them or on them," so total result!

Yeah, they're really good because they just...there's a little note under everything on their shelf, or you can see through it so you can see if there's eggs on the top or... But they're great like that, and normally, as well, their staff don't have to go and look – they know because they make them out the back, so they know straightaway.

...you can see the chefs, and they're totally accessible to just nip up and say "Excuse me, do you bind the burgers with egg or not?" you know, and they'd say "No, we don't, but the breadcrumbs on the chicken are, but we can do them without if you want." And it's just like that quick – you don't have to ask a waitress to go in the back to ask two or three chefs to come out, so that makes a difference.

<Internals\\A59 G1 S>

I'll go, and I just said "I have an allergy, will it be okay?" and they were like "Yeah, and we'll keep it in a separate – there's a separate [pot/part], there's a separate area, and it will be prepared on a separate board. It will be fine." And, yeah, so it was, and any of the dishes that actually have nuts in them that I wanted, they said that they could prepare separately so I could eat them, so they were really, really good there.

Yeah. You see, that was very good. That was a rarity. I wouldn't...I didn't expect it to be that good when I went. Everywhere has kind of just got this..."Oh well, we can't guarantee it," because they don't want to be in trouble if I do have a reaction. So, everywhere is kind of the same really.

<Internals\\A6 G1 E>

I suppose just the thing that you'd got to know them and stuff. Like, going in somewhere new, asking a waitress "Is there nuts in this?" and getting a "No" because they don't think there is, but they haven't asked the chef, whereas someone where I've been in, and every time I go in, I might ask, and they're like, "No (name of interviewee), there's no reason there should be nuts in it today!" you know, sort of like just used, yeah, just used to it. They do do food with nuts in, but I've spoke to them in the (Asian) shop and they're not prepared in the same places, so they're fine, like as far as they're concerned, and obviously I've taken her word on that occasion and tried it, and never had a problem. It's really hard because I love that food, but I do have to be careful.

<Internals\\A60 G1 E>

The ones we tend to frequent [in] bits and pieces, em, I've actually gone in – they've taken me into the kitchen and shown me that they do keep separate containers and bits and pieces, and they don't have nuts just sat around.

... if you get brushed off really: "Oh yeah, yeah, we can deal with that, that's absolutely fine – oh yes, of course it's nut-free, " or "Of course it's wheat-free." There's no substance to that whatsoever. Whereas, if somebody actually takes the time to come out and say, you know, yes, this is...or "We can guarantee that this is..." you know, "We keep everything in separate containers and [there's no] cross-contamination..."

<Internals\\A8 G2 E>

If I've asked, em, for them to go and say, "Oh, I'll go and ask," rather than me having to say "Can you go and ask for me?" or them to just know or to have...

<Internals\\P1 G1 E> -

Looking at the menu but because it's quite an expensive restaurant the people who serve you are very knowledgeable, they would do anything to sort of help you so I find that the more you pay, the better the service. So then you can find out much more information they can tell you exactly how things are cooked, exactly. So it's safer from that option because you know what is a definite no, no.

To me some people I think seem to be more sympathetic than others and then you don't want to go back to that place. But that is how I've found it.

<Internals\\P2 G1 E>

When I talked to the frontline staff, some were a little unsure, some would say let me get the manager for you, or some would wait for me to say, "Can I talk to the manager?" None were unpleasant; they want you to come back, so there has to be some kind of mediation. Most of the managers seemed aware of what products they were using, some could say pretty much off the top of their heads what kind of bases they were using. Some who were very good said let me double check. To make sure, some would say no it's not in it.

... sometimes you get a lot of young counter staff, no disrespect to them, but they are just sales staff. Then you get older staff, who know a little bit more, or who've been there longer, who know a bit more about the

ingredients within the products. It seems to be an age thing, the older the member of staff, the more kind of proactive....

<Internals\\P5 G2 E> - § 3 references coded [1.05% Coverage]

They can fob you off. But sometimes waitresses will go in and come back out and say 'yep, the chef says this and this' and it sounds quite positive. You sort of get more confident from other people's confidence.

<Internals\\P9 G1 NI>

A good restaurant will also tell their, chef will also tell their servers, if people are allergic to nuts, fish, anything like that, this dish has it, this dish has it and compile a sort of list. If they don't know these things then they should be able to go and ask the chef.

Negative interactions with staff

<Internals\\A11 G1 S>

So, I started eating this meal, and all of a sudden, it was like, um, I'm not sure about this...this isn't a flavour or a texture or a shape that I'm very comfortable with here... The manager asked him and he was like, "No, no, it's fine, it's fine." And I actually, I was so unsure of myself that I packed a couple of prawns into a napkin and went to another restaurant, like just up the road, and went "Are these prawns?" and they're like, "Yeah!", and I was pretty furious.

<Internals\\A13 G2 W>

I suppose just their attitude towards it I think. Like both me and my sister have been made to feel really uncomfortable in a place before, and that's been at the cost of us going in there again.

Just that...once, a waitress came over...we'd asked for... We asked for the gluten-free menu, and she was like, "Yeah, no problem," brought them over to us and was like, "Okay, so which one of you are the awkward ones then?" and we were like, actually, we're not being awkward, it's a condition! We thought that was quite rude, and em, yeah, just being spoken to like that

<Internals\\A19 G2 NI>

So, I just think that they don't really...they don't really know about it, and they can't really... They ask me what I would like instead of telling me options that I could have that are gluten-free, so they don't know either.

<Internals\\A23 G2 NI>

And then I also do sometimes believe that, from my own experience of working in retail, a lot of the time, I think if you ask somebody, you know, in a restaurant, a waiter, "Is there corn flour in that?" they'll probably just say no or yes on the spur of the moment, without even knowing, just to tell you something

<Internals\\A24 G1 NI>

Well, I was in, em, I was in (burger chain) once and I asked for a burger. I asked for a plain one and it came with salad on it. Whenever I took it back, it was just scraped off, you know, so I could still see that, you know, there was still some of it on.

<Internals\\A25 G1 E>

They'll say things like "Mm, we can't be sure," and things like that, and it could be in contact with nuts. Em...maybe if there's more young staff, they're probably new and they don't know much about the kitchens, yeah, that would put me off a little bit.

<Internals\\A27 G1 W>

Yes, and you can ask them. Well, in (Asian restaurant) and these restaurants, you can ask them and they will say "Oh no, there's no peanuts in it," and you see them and you know they're...They don't tell you the truth, do they? No. Because, after all, they're in the game to make money, they want to sell their food, doesn't matter about you.....Yes. You can't blame the waitresses, in a way, because they don't know what's in the things, do they?

<Internals\\A31 G1 S>

In (place name) – it was horrible! Me and my sister were camping, and there was a little café and this horrible woman... I went in and I could see there were nuts in lots of stuff, and I wanted a cake and I said “Has that one got nuts?” and I said okay, because it looked nutty to me, looked a bit nutty, and then... So she said, “No, no, it’s not, no!” and she was quite rude, and so I said, “Oh right, okay,” I said, “because I have got a serious allergy.” And this is really unusual for me to say that much, but she was not nice. So, she said, “Oh no, it’s definitely not – you know, I’ve told you it hasn’t.” So, I took it, sat outside on the bench, and one sort of taste or bite sort of said that, yeah, this has got almonds in it, and my lips went up. With the nut allergy - I didn’t develop anaphylaxis that time, it was just the kind of beginnings - you get like this sort of sense of doom, and that’s like one of the, em, sort of symptoms of anaphylaxis coming, and it’s horrible because you’re just like crying and you’re like I’m going to die, I’m going to die, and that’s the feeling – it’s horrible! So my poor sister was there and she was like, “Oh no!” you know, “What’s happening?!” and she sort of ran back in and she said, “That has got nuts in it!” and she checked then and said, “Oh right, yeah, okay...” but obviously when I was like... I was ill, but thankfully not to the extent I was last time.

<Internals\\A32 G2 S>

I’ve actually got a friend who, when I was telling them about the diagnosis, years and years ago, he used to work in a kitchen, and he had said a lot of people would, you know, the waiting staff would come through and say, oh, the person was asking is it gluten-free, and they used to just kind of laugh and say, “Oh, just tell them it’s not.” You know, I think a lot of people didn’t know that it is a serious thing, and that’s...that’s just, you know, a misconception, that people are thinking that, oh, they’re just trying to, you know, create a fuss or, you know, create a big problem.

<Internals\\A33 G1 S>

I get it quite a lot on aeroplanes because they’re so busy trying to get people in the door and then taking off, and then, once you’re up in the air, that’s when they tell you. Often, that’s quite a hassle because what if somebody in the aeroplane is eating peanuts while taking off, and they never seem to remember, or they never seem to be that bothered about it. They tell you once [everybody is in] the aircraft, so that’s when I get quite riled, quite annoyed about the fact they’ve not told anybody yet, because it’s such an enclosed area, and you’re sharing the same air as everybody, another 500 passengers, so if somebody’s eating peanuts in the back of the plane, that air is all through, circulating where you’re sitting. [?].

<Internals\\A34 G2 W>

I’ll send it back. If it comes and it’s not...I have done that, and I’ll just say that...just take it back. You know, like I’ve had salads and they’ve got dressings on, and most of them have got sesame in. You know, you’ll always get a sesame seed dressing, and if they’ve drizzled like that, I’ll say I can’t eat it. And you’re looking at £8 or £9...for me to push to the side....

<Internals\\A36 G2 W>

Because I don’t think they’d have a clue. I couldn’t trust them. I think...they might have gone back to the kitchen and think, “Oh, I can’t be arsed,” and then come back and say, “Oh no, it’s fine.”

<Internals\\A38 G3 W>

And it’s sort of like, well, you know, this is...has been asked... So, I do think that some places... But I think the majority of places now seem to be better, but I don’t know whether it’s the waiting staff that aren’t relaying the messages to the kitchen, I don’t know.

<Internals\\A39 G1 W>

Some places, (pub chain), you know, you go there for a quick bite and stuff – they’re rubbish. They write it all on the computer and it comes out on a plate, celery or something or cucumber. So, I think you learn to know where you can.....It’s the uncertainty of not knowing that people know what they’re doing. I know it sounds stupid...

I was eating it and I said – and we’d checked before, there’s no...? “No, it’s fine.” I took a mouthful and I was like “There’s something not right in there.” So, everyone else had a taste and it was like, “Tastes like there’s almonds in it...” I was like, oh [sighing], and of course it started coming up again and... So, they came out and

were like, “Oh, so sorry, so sorry!” but it was all planned in advance so it should have been... It was a mistake on the waiter’s part that...

<Internals\\A44 G1 E>

If they show me or they actually physically get the item and bring out the packaging, whatever, which I’ve had, you know, then it’s...then it gives you that level of confidence. But if they go “Oh, I’m not sure what that means,” or “Oh, I don’t know,” you know, you can just tell by that person [laughing], and that’s when I’m like, no, don’t worry, I won’t eat it [laughing]!

And that’s what he kept coming out and saying to me, “Oh, I don’t know – we haven’t got that, we haven’t got that, you know, we don’t know the answers,” to some of them. But because he said it differently, it made me feel a little bit less angry, but because the girl behind the counter was going, “Oh, no, this is only how you can have it, no, this is only...”

<Internals\\A46 G2 E>

You know, you just feel a bit, em, I don’t know, like you’re being a bit demanding or something when, you know, if those people could come and see the reaction that it’s going to have, then they probably wouldn’t be, you know, quite so judgemental.

<Internals\\A48 G2 S>

It depends. If it’s an older person serving you, then yes, but if it’s a younger person, they go, “Oh, what’s coeliac...?!”

<Internals\\A49 G1 E>

Sometimes, yeah. Like, sometimes, em, they say, “Oh, I’ll go to the kitchen,” and then come back and then they can’t really remember or something, and then they’ve said “Oh, I’ll just get the chef out to talk to you about...

Yeah, I think it is a thing that sometimes you will say like “Oh, but I’ll have to have it without the dressing,” and they bring it out and they’ve completely forgotten that you asked for that, and it’s like drenched in it, and you have to, you know, again, say, “Well, actually, I did say...can you make a new one?” which is a bit of a pain.

Whereas, some places, you know, it might be like the sauces, that I like the sound of the sea-bass and it’s coming with like a crayfish infused sauce or something, so obviously I can’t have that, but I want to have the sea-bass, like I find these places will whip you up some other kind of sauce that will be complementary, which is really good, but I find some places will just, “Okay, but you just won’t have any sauce.” You’re just like eating something bland and I find that like not as...

<Internals\\A5 G2 E>

Yeah, I would ask them, but I...depending on how they react, their answers, is how much I believe them, because, you know, you can say does that have something in it and they go “Oh no!” or “Oh yes!” and they know, but if they say, “Oh, I don’t know, I’ll have to check with the chef,” and all that, you think, well, you should know the answer to that really, if you work here, you know. So, em, yeah, I’d always ask them and then see what their answer is, if I trust them or not

<Internals\\A50 G2 E>

A couple of times, em, I think there was one time I ended up with a plate of what was definitely pearl barley, and I just said “I’m sorry, I can’t eat that.” So, you know, the chef came out and it was like “But it’s barley, it’s not wheat!” Yeah! So, sometimes, there’s not an understanding about...you know, it’s not just about wheat, it’s other grains as well. So, I feel that, you know, it is my responsibility to be clear about what I’m eating, but also to, you know, be prepared to say “I can’t eat that” or educate.

I nearly got beaten up by a chef. It’s a long time ago. I must have been in my early-twenties and it was a fish meal – that’s all I can remember – and the query went back, you know, “Is this gluten-free?” and he came out and he was absolutely ranging, “Who’s asking about...?!” you know, di-di-di. And it was kind of...it was such an aggressive response to that request, em, I was quite shocked by it.

<Internals\\A52 G1 S>

I tried to ask if there was any nuts in anything, and I got the blank look, you know, from the little girl who was serving us. I mean, you know, these...you know, they're kids who are part-time. That's, you know, they aren't been paid enough to know. You know, they don't sort of...they're not close enough to the food to know. But, you know, then we got the supervisor, who then checked with the manager – you know, it was just...what a nonsense. And, yeah, I mean it was...especially when you're with kids who are starving, you know, and want to get ordering and things, and it was busy anyway, and yeah, it was just...it was not the best experience.

<Internals\\A59 G1 S>

Yes, sometimes they won't... I like it when they go to the kitchen and they come back to the table and tell you that it's fine, but a couple of the places I've been, they've not come back to the table, and then they've just brought the food over, and I've been like, "Oh, this is definitely okay?" and they're like, "Eh, yeah..." So, I don't know whether it's just like the waitress or waiter is forgetting to go and ask the kitchen, but then I'm always a bit like ooh ...I ask them to re-check in the kitchen and they come back and then I eat it. I wouldn't eat it until they've checked

<Internals\\A60 G1 E>

I've been to restaurants before where you tell them you have an allergy and they still serve you up, you know... And you ask for, you know, "What's in the sauce – are there any nuts?" Is there this, that or the other.... "Oh, no, no, no, you're absolutely fine!" and, sure enough, there are....Because there's other places, you call and they "Oh, yes, yes, we can cater for that!" and then there's no substance to it whatsoever. I think, with people with severe allergies, you take a bit of a punt any time you go out, for any meal really. It's as much about the interaction with the staff.

<Internals\\A9 G1 E>

Actually, yeah, there was once, when I had a pasta with pesto, and pesto includes pistachios so it's kind of nuts, yeah, so... [What I had] was...because it was...because we used to serve this meal like with little bowl of pesto, and she thought she can just take away that bowl, but it was a little bit, it dropped, so it was already inside the pasta. Yeah, so it was...that caused a little bit, mm...

<Internals\\P1 G1 E>

I mean you try to ask, you try to look and see what is on the menu, you try to ask but you know it doesn't always work perfectly. So sometimes the waiters and waitresses don't know, sometimes I think they don't even really understand what I'm trying to explain to them about lactose and what it is. So I don't expect them to get it.... It's amazing that some people who are waiting on tables don't even know what lactose is or don't really understand what it is in. So I think in terms of training in this day and age, if someone has got a gluten allergy or whatever they should know, the people serving the food should at least have some clue, so they can give some advice.

<Internals\\P11 G1 W>

Yeah I've had a few places that they just think I'm a bit of a fussy mother probably. I can't think of the names of them now. I know once at a carvery they did, a bit like cauliflower cheese, but it was broccoli, cauliflower and melted cheese, and I did say to the chef one day, the boy on the counter, because he was just throwing some roast potatoes in, and I said 'Does that contain cheese?', 'Well what do you think?' he went and he walked off. Well there is no menu to say there is broccoli and cauliflower with melted cheese on top, it just looked like roast potato on top of cauliflower cheese and it was just grilled. If I hadn't have asked I wouldn't have thought that was cheese on the top. I just thought it was crunchy potato put on the plate.

<Internals\\P14 G3 E>

Yes, but I haven't done anything about it at the time, like this ice cream place where it wasn't dairy free and there was something else recently I said to (name) and I said this has got cream in it so you can finish it off

<Internals\\P15 G2 S>

And the only café we go to is in a family centre and they sell healthy food but the chef, I don't know what he was thinking. I took my own soup in for lunch because it's not always dairy free. And the guy was fine with us heating up our soup but then eh sort of said 'our soup's always gluten free and its always dairy free'. The assistant was behind and said 'yeah but there's parmesan in it today!' Yes, that's why I've got my own soup.

<Internals\\P2 G1 E>

sometimes you get a lot of young counter staff, no disrespect to them, but they are just sales staff. Then you get older staff, who know a little bit more, or who've been there longer, who know a bit more about the ingredients within the products. It seems to be an age thing, the older the member of staff, the more kind of proactive....

<Internals\\P5 G2 E> -

Because they don't know what's in it.....With someone frowning going...'hmmm...no I don't think we use gluten here'. So they obviously don't know what it is. So that doesn't instil me with hope.

And I don't know if it's a language thing...but the (Asian restaurant) they don't know what you're talking about. They're very friendly and will cook you something but they don't really know what you're talking about.

<Internals\\P6 G1 S>

even if it's a certain type of sponge, or something, or something (child's name) would quite like tonight, we ask the question, but if the staff are unsure we just don't bother, which is a shame, because you think the staff should be more up to speed.

<Internals\\P7 G3 NI>

Maybe when they've come and it's – if something he's chosen has come with cheese or something like that and you've asked for it not to have the cheese on it and they've brought it out with the cheese, then you would have to say look he can't take the cheese or whatever.

<Internals\\P8 G1 S>

You get a feeling sometimes when you go into a place and, to be honest, if people can't reassure you we're not going to sit and think well it might be okay, it might not. If they can't, or if they take the liberty, of course, yes, it's fine, then you think well you don't really know what you're talking about. You have to trust your gut instinct.

<Internals\\P9 G1 NI>

Yes. He has a dairy allergy and if there's anything that has milk, cream or butter I will pick something different for him. We've been lied to a couple of times and my partner's chased it straight away and we've literally said, you know, we're not stupid....sometimes it happens and they intentionally do it because they don't have time, so it does make things awkward, especially when you get into arguments with staff, 'no it doesn't', 'yes it does'. That has happened before, we have been in an argument with a manager of a restaurant because there's milk in it, and cream, and a lot of salt. You just kind of have to be like, you know, this is going to have a really serious affect later.

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