

## Tips for managing food allergies at work



Do you feel uncomfortable trying to manage your food allergies at work? Are you self-conscious turning down a slice of a co-worker's birthday cake because you have an egg allergy? Do you think only children should have peanut allergies? Do you avoid going out to eat with colleagues because you don't want to ask the waiter about ingredients?

It's important for your health—and the health of co-workers who may also be suffering in silence—to be comfortable talking about food allergies. Here are some tips for managing your allergies in different work situations:

<b>Tell your supervisor</b>	If you need to adjust your responsibilities to avoid food allergy triggers, your supervisor should know. For example, if you have a peanut allergy, your employer may need to arrange for peanut-free lunch menu items or designated break room tables for people with food allergies.
<b>Enlist the support of co-workers</b>	Yes, it may be difficult for people to deal with a chronic condition that they can't see, but open communication can help you and them. Post a sign in your office or cubicle. Thank them for being sensitive to your food allergies. Offer to consult with anyone planning functions with food involved. Be an advocate and educator for food allergies, and you'll probably end up helping a lot more people than you can imagine.
<b>Meetings</b>	If you're attending a meeting where food will be served, let the meeting organizer know ahead of time that you have a food allergy. The organizer may want to ask people to refrain from bringing food into the meeting room.
<b>Going out to eat with co-workers</b>	You don't want to miss out on opportunities to socialize or conduct business with co-workers or your manager at a restaurant. Perhaps you can suggest a list of restaurants where you know you can get a safe meal. Or call the restaurant in advance to make sure they have—or can make—a safe dish for you. If it's a spontaneous invitation, you can still suggest a restaurant. Don't feel embarrassed! Think of it this way: an allergic reaction and a trip to the hospital are likely to be more embarrassing than speaking up in the first place.
<b>Workplace parties</b>	If your office likes to have parties, you might suggest celebrating special occasions with non-food activities. Or bring your own meal and utensils to avoid contamination. Again, it's important to communicate with your supervisor and colleagues. The more they understand about food allergies, the less awkward these conversations—and accommodations—should be.

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