



# *Stress-Free Hosting*

How-To Guide for Hosting Guests  
with Dietary Limitations

Bethany G. Cox

Second Edition

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## Disclaimer

This guide is not meant to be used to diagnose or treat any illness. Always seek the help of a physician or trained professional when dealing with medical, health, or dietary needs. The information in this guide is based on my education and work as a nutritionist and my personal experience. As such, the information is complete to the best of my knowledge, but it is not to be taken as a source of medical advice or as a way to diagnose, treat, or cure any medical issue.

The intention of this guide is to help mitigate some of the risks of cross contact and educate readers on ways to prepare food for those with dietary limitations. It does not, and cannot, cover all potential scenarios. As an introductory guide, this information is not exhaustive or comprehensive, meaning it cannot be seen as the only source of information. Please work with your guest to identify any further steps, procedures, or places where you may need to mitigate risk.

## Welcome

Hi there! I'm so glad you decided to purchase this guide. I know it'll be a tremendous resource for you on your journey of hosting someone with a dietary limitation. But before we go any further, I want to start by saying that you're extraordinary. *Me? Extraordinary? How?* you may ask. Because by stepping outside of your own comfort zone, you're touching someone else's heart and choosing to love them well. By hosting them, you're extending an olive branch and reaching out with your heart. That's huge! And it's beautiful. And just know, whoever you bought this book to prepare for will feel your love, and that legitimately brings tears to my eyes.

*Tears? Really?* you may wonder. Yes, tears. Let me explain why. I've lived with dietary limitations since early elementary school, long before it was normal or common. Throughout childhood, I learned how to blend in—how to make as few waves as possible—to prevent drawing attention to myself. It was painful and lonely. And sometimes, to this day, even though I have far fewer dietary restrictions than I used to, it's still painful.

Growing up, I desperately wished I had more people like you—someone willing to understand me and love me well—in my corner. To be honest, I wish it even now. Life with dietary restrictions can be incredibly hard, but your willingness to be supportive and helpful to the person in your life with special dietary needs is more touching than you know. It'll go a long way, I promise.

But maybe you're reading this and thinking, *Someone gifted me this guide. I don't know that I'm up for this.* That's okay, too! You're capable of incredible things as well. I know that's true because the person who gifted you this guide believes in you. They see you as someone they can trust; someone who's willing to love them well. This friend or loved one is longing for a place to belong and feel safe, and they chose you, of all people, to partner with to create that environment. What an honor! You truly are special, and this guide is for you, just as much as it is for anyone else.

## A Little about Me



My personal struggle with dietary limitations was an important driving force behind me majoring in nutrition in college. I wanted to learn more about my own health, but more importantly, I had a desire to help others who had dietary limitations. But like you may have experienced in your own life, my path took several twists and turns along the way after graduation, and I never had the opportunity to pursue my original dream. Until now.

Along the bumpy road to get here, God saw fit to give me the exact experiences I would need to serve you and your loved ones well, and I'm so thankful. From my personal experience with dietary limitations, to my nutrition degree, to working at WIC (Women, Infants, and Children), to teaching nutrition in a regionally known culinary arts program, to running a Cooking Matters program, and everything in between, I know I can provide you with the information and skills you need to host your friends and loved ones well.

## Start Here

As you may have seen while scrolling past the table of contents, this guide is packed with information. So much so that you may be wondering how you're supposed to get through it all before your event. Well, I have good news! You aren't meant to read this book from cover to cover. I designed it to be tailored to the needs of your guest and your event. But, even so, let me show you how to get the most out of this resource.

Part I: Understanding is designed to help you better understand the person you plan to host. Only by understanding them can you host them well. Since that's our goal, we need to start from the beginning and set the proper foundation. Without it, there will be gaps in your ability to help your guest. To build the structure that everything else will be built upon, please read these sections in their entirety: Your Guest, The Taste, and Cost and Menu Planning. These three sections, including the subsections, are foundational to your ability to connect with and understand your guest. You won't want to miss what I have for you in those pages. It'll be invaluable to you.

Once you've read the first three sections of Part I, you are welcome to skip around the remaining two sections: Reasons behind Dietary Limitations and Common Dietary Limitations. In these sections, you can jump to the information that pertains to your guest and leave the rest for another time.

## Start Here

As you go along, you may notice that certain pieces of content and pro tips are repeated—whether exactly or very similarly—in a few places, mostly within the latter sections of Part I. This was done intentionally, since those tidbits are too good for you to miss out on as you only read the parts of these sections that pertain to your guest. But don't worry! The vast majority of this guide's content is fresh and unique to each section. To make the guide as user friendly as possible, though, I've marked the repeated content with asterisks and put the parts that differ in italics to allow for an easier read.

Part II: Practical Application is where I teach you the skills you'll need to effectively host your guest. I suggest reading Part II in its entirety. Without the complete picture, you'll struggle to prepare and serve your guest with dietary limitations well.

Part III: Resources is where I've gathered some additional goodies that may be helpful for you, including a glossary and helpful links, internet searches, and app suggestions mentioned elsewhere in the guide. Underlined words throughout Part I are ones that have been defined in the glossary.

There are three features that will help you easily navigate from place to place within this guide: the clickable table of contents allows you to tap or click the desired section name or page number, the search function allows you to search the entire guide for a word or phrase (which can be especially useful if you want to revisit something but don't remember where it was), and the page number selector allows you to jump to any page.

## Start Here

It may be tempting to skip around the guide the whole time, but I need you to know you won't get as much out of it that way. By following the path I've just laid out, you'll gain so much more confidence and knowledge and be better prepared for your event. And that's my heart's desire for you.

NOTE: It would simply be impossible to cover every cause or dietary restriction in a single guide. That said, even if your guest's dietary limitation isn't covered, the rest of this guide will still be extremely useful to you. But in a situation where your guest's limitation falls outside the scope of this guide, you're welcome to message me at [connect@bethanycox.com](mailto:connect@bethanycox.com) about the specifics of their diet or menu options for them. I only ask that you reserve this option for the above-mentioned purpose.

Let's get started!



**Part I: Understanding**

## Your Guest

### The Fear . . . on Both Sides

As the host, you may be feeling anxious about preparing for someone with a dietary limitation. Maybe you're afraid of messing something up, embarrassing yourself or them, making them sick, or offending them. Hosting someone with a limitation can feel big and overwhelming at times, and at first, the length of this guide may add to that fear. Maybe it's enough to make you doubt yourself or make you wish you could back out. Let me just say this: it's okay to feel that way. Doing something new, especially when it could impact someone's health, can be scary. Your feelings are normal, so feel confident in putting them aside for now. Later, once we've made it through the guide, you can return to these feelings and say, "Nope! I can do this!"

But those feelings you may be experiencing? Your guest is going through something similar. Being on the other end of it is also scary. It takes a lot of courage for your guest to go to an event, not knowing if there will be anything they can eat or if the food will make them sick. So if someone with a dietary limitation accepts your invitation, just know they're doing it afraid, too.

Dietary limitations can feel so isolating. In my experience, people at events either have a ton of questions, many of which are uncomfortable, or they treat you like an oddity. Those with dietary limitations have a deep desire to feel normal, so if you can help them achieve even a semblance of that, it'll be a beautiful gift.

### **Hurtful Comments Can Cause Unseen Damage**

Kindness goes a long way when it comes to your guest with special dietary needs. It may surprise you, but it happens quite often that the person with a dietary limitation is mocked, has jokes made about them, or experiences snide comments. This is incredibly hurtful, even if the person doesn't show it. Even if you feel you may have said some hurtful things to this guest or someone else in the past, there's always room for a fresh start. I encourage you to wipe the slate clean and explain that you're trying to make a change. This is where we find common ground and can start again. And if you haven't made hurtful comments in the past, I encourage you to keep your ears open for them the day of your event. Again, part of hosting people in general is creating a space where everyone feels safe and included.

Part of showing your guest kindness is also understanding that hurtful comments can take on more shapes than just mocking, jokes, and snide comments. Suggesting to a guest that they can pick out or off the offending ingredient or that they can eat the food this one time is deeply hurtful and can be dangerous to their health. Someone with a gluten intolerance cannot simply pick the croutons off the salad. Someone with a lactose intolerance or milk allergy cannot simply scrape off the melted cheese. Someone who is vegan shouldn't be asked to pick out the meat from a dish. These suggestions may be made from a place of trying to help or make the best of a situation, but they actually show a lack of understanding.

## Hurtful Comments Can Cause Unseen Damage

In these situations where accidents or mistakes happen, your guest may opt to only eat what they feel is safe, mostly to avoid being an inconvenience. I remember many events where I ended up not being able to eat much of anything for one reason or another, and I had to fight to keep the tears at bay or to keep my disappointment from showing. That may seem dramatic, but it's difficult to feel excluded and to be questioned about why you aren't eating. It's possible your guest would really be as okay with it as they say, but it's also possible they would feel like I did, and you can't always tell by their outward actions.

**Pro tip:** If a mistake is made with the food, ask the guest how you can help make an adjustment or how you can help make it right. Your guest likely knows what they can easily make with a set of ingredients, so work with them to alter the food on hand or make something quick and easy. This could create extra work for you, but I hope you realize it's worth it to gain your guest's trust and to keep them safe.

### **Normalizing the Need**

As we'll see, most guests with dietary limitations are not trying to be difficult. In fact, they're probably trying to blend into the background. Most limitations are health related and are hard for your guest. They're trying to live as normal of a life as possible, but food can be a source of anxiety for them, which, as you can imagine, is a hard way to live. Please don't be offended when they ask seemingly odd questions, ask to see the ingredients, or ask how you made something.

It's very likely that your guest already feels like an inconvenience, which is why they often decline invitations or offer to provide their own food. They want to avoid the hassle, the potential embarrassment, or the possibility of getting sick. Like I said, it takes a lot of courage to accept an invitation, so choose to see them as brave, rather than as a hindrance or a challenge.

Your guest may say they'll eat before they come, or, as I mentioned, that they can bring their own food. There's a chance your guest needs to do this because of a severe or unique limitation. But there's also a chance they want to keep from being a burden. I encourage you to gently ask questions to determine where they're coming from, which I'll teach you how to do in the Questions to Ask Beforehand section of Part II. If your guest truly does need to bring their own food, there are ways you can still host them well and make them feel welcome and included, which is also discussed in Part II.

## Normalizing the Need

Now, before we move to the next section, I want to address a potential situation you may encounter. While most guests with dietary limitations try to blend in, there are others who are, shall we say, enthusiastic about the diet they're on. Maybe they've recently made a dietary change and are seeing health benefits, have strong views about certain topics surrounding food, or are bold about their religious beliefs.

Whatever the reason, I have two pieces of advice. First and foremost, focus on preparing food they can have, whatever that may look like. You want them to feel just as welcome as anyone else. Second, acknowledge their health achievement, passion, or beliefs in a way that helps them feel seen: "You're seeing such good results. I'm proud of you for sticking with it." "You have so much passion surrounding \_\_\_\_\_. I really admire that." "You have so much knowledge about \_\_\_\_\_. I'm impressed." From there, you can steer the conversation toward more neutral topics. If you're unsure how to shift the focus away from your guest, the techniques in the next section can be modified to fit this situation.



### **Feeling Seen without Feeling Stared At**

I think it's safe to say that we, as humans, have an innate desire to be understood and accepted. This desire absolutely extends to a person's dietary limitations. Your guest isn't asking others to know all the details of their limitation or exactly what to do or say.

Instead, they're simply hoping for someone to come alongside them, someone to still invite them to events, someone to meet them halfway. It's important for your guest to know you respect their limitation, even if you don't fully understand it.

Equally important is that your guest feels safe with you. Their fear surrounding food may always be there, even if only a little. But chances are your guest is also afraid of being the center of attention. One of the last things your guest wants to experience is feeling like a fish in a fishbowl, where all eyes are on them. They'd rather blend into the background than have everyone making comments, asking questions, or treating them differently. People are naturally curious. Your guest understands that. But a line is crossed when the limitation becomes the only thing people care to ask them about or when they feel judged or embarrassed.

## Feeling Seen without Feeling Stared At

The best way to overcome this is to make the person's limitation the least interesting thing about them. For example, did your guest just start a new job, adopt a new pet, start a new hobby, get a promotion, get back from a trip, start/finish school, start a business or new venture, plant a garden for the first time, buy a house, etc.? Help them shine without making them feel uncomfortable by framing things as compliments or as if you're bragging on them. You could say, "Did you know [insert guest's name] just adopted a new pet from the shelter? He's the cutest, too!" You may not be intimately aware of these types of details, but you can easily steer the conversation away from the limitation once your guest has answered a few polite questions. If, by chance, all you know about your guest is that they have a certain limitation, use the time to get to know them better. I promise, there are much more interesting things about them than what they can't eat. Simply ask them meaningful questions. We can all do that.

Clearly, this advice is best used at a small dinner or holiday party, but the principle can still be used at larger functions. As the host of a larger event, you'll likely mingle at some point. If you hear a group discussing someone's limitation, linger a little while and help steer the conversation. The guest with the special dietary need will be eternally grateful.

Another way you can help your guest feel seen and understood is by remembering what you were told about their restriction. If you communicated with them ahead of time or someone else conveyed the information, they'll be so thankful and appreciative that you remembered.

## Feeling Seen without Feeling Stared At

In practice, this looks like asking polite questions if you need more information. It also looks like speaking to them away from the crowd to explain the plans you have for serving the food or whatever else you have in place. It doesn't, however, look like asking them pointed questions in front of other guests or saying things like, "What *can* you have?" or "Remind me again what you can't eat," or grabbing foods and saying, "Can you have this?" Your guest will probably wish the floor would swallow them whole.

It also looks like not announcing their limitation to the group. You may be thinking, *Well, duh*. But this happens a lot more subtly than you may think. A well-meaning host may label food with the person's name, make an announcement that certain food is only for [insert person's name], talk with other guests about how they made the food a special way for [insert person's name], etc. These things bring undue attention to your guest, and these same things can be reframed to bring less attention to the individual. Instead of labels with the person's name, you could simply label the food as dairy-free, gluten-free, nut-free, etc. Instead of naming the person in an announcement, you could simply say to the group that you've prepared or have some sugar-free, vegan, soy-free, etc. food for those who have dietary limitations. And instead of telling others about the hard work you did—which I know you will have done—let it be a special moment between you and your guest with the dietary limitation.

### The Taste

Let's say you're open to the idea of preparing specialty food for your guest, but you're left wondering, *Will the food even taste good?* That's a valid question, so don't feel bad for thinking it. There are brands and recipes that taste so similar to their counterparts that you really can't tell the difference. I've even found or made some that, without a doubt, outshine the conventional versions. But it's also true that there are brands and recipes that . . . aren't so great. I'd like to tell you there's a magic way of knowing the difference ahead of time, but so much of altering recipes and trying new products is about trial and error.

**Pro tip:** Reviews will be your best friend. If you find a product at the store or a recipe online that you'd like to try, look at the reviews. Check out the low-star reviews, but don't dwell there. Instead, check out the mid-range reviews, which should provide you with a more well-rounded evaluation. For better or worse, the comment sections on blogs can be filled with everyone's changes to the recipe. Some of these comments are very helpful, and some are simply based on preference. Patterns often speak for themselves, though, so if you see multiple people commenting the same thing, it's probably safe to follow their advice.

## The Taste

Altered recipes rarely taste the same as they would with the normal ingredients, which makes sense, right? You're using different ingredients, so it makes sense that the final product would taste or behave different than the original. From my experience, it can take many, many attempts with different ingredients to achieve the desired taste, and even then, the result may not be identical to the original. So if you're wanting to alter Great Aunt Susie's famous chocolate chip cookies, just know that they may not turn out exactly as you hoped the first time.

This is one of the main reasons why, for beginners, I recommend finding highly rated recipes online. It'll save you a lot of time, frustration, and money. You can use physical cookbooks that are meant for the limitation your guest has, but you won't get the benefit of reading reviews. This advice applies to things like baked goods, but simple things like gravies and some side dishes can easily be altered without changing the taste much at all. These can be easy wins in the kitchen, actually!



### **Cost and Menu Planning**

Before moving on, I feel it's necessary to talk about cost and menu planning. Specialty ingredients and products are more expensive than regular food. This is your guest's reality, unfortunately. Please don't let this be a deterrent for you when it comes to inviting someone to your event or holiday gathering. After all, the extra cost is worth helping someone feel loved, right?

Let me encourage you to not cut corners when it comes to ingredients. Buying questionable products may put your guest at risk of being exposed to the item they can't have. Instead, I've included some tips and tricks you can use to keep costs as low as possible.

When planning your menu, choose as many foods as possible that are naturally free of the ingredient your guest can't have. For example, if you were planning a cost-effective menu to accommodate someone who is vegan, consider a meatless recipe like chili with beans or spaghetti that has sausage on the side as an optional add-on. Or if you're planning a menu to accommodate someone who is dairy-free, choose items that are naturally free of dairy like baked or barbecue chicken (checking the ingredients of spices and sauces first, of course) with vegetables that don't typically need butter, like steamed green beans or grilled asparagus, or a simple side salad with a vinaigrette-type dressing. You get the idea. While it's an option to alter recipes or find store-bought alternatives, it'll be easier and cheaper to plan a menu that's naturally free of the restricted food. This can be tricky around the holidays, but it's still doable. For more info surrounding the holidays, see the Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks section in Part II.

## Cost and Menu Planning

Most importantly when menu planning, you'll want to make sure your guest with dietary restrictions has a protein, two or three sides, and bread or a bread alternative if your meal calls for it. Let's say you're already planning on having a protein everyone can eat.

Awesome choice! In addition to that, you'll want to make sure they can have two to three sides. I say two to three because one isn't really enough to allow them to feel fully included, but four or more are too many.

And as I said, if your meal requires bread, crackers, or something similar but your guest has a limitation that keeps them from having the traditional item, you may have to think outside the box to find an alternative that works for them. There are plenty of specialty breads, rolls, pitas, tortillas, crackers, etc. on the market. You can even have whole lettuce leaves to use as a wrap in place of a bun or use tortilla chips in place of crackers if you can't find anything else that will work. Regardless, check with your guest first. Ask them if they'd be okay with the swap. Plenty of guests would prefer no bread at all. Others may opt to bring their own.

If you're feeling overwhelmed right now by all this talk of altering recipes and finding alternatives, let me give you some peace of mind. There are literally hundreds of recipes and suggestions online for just about any dietary restriction you can think of. You don't have to overhaul your recipe if that worries you. Simply find a different recipe or workaround. I suggest using Pinterest to find recipes, but a general internet search can produce good results too.

## Cost and Menu Planning

**Pro tip:** I know this may seem silly, since anyone can claim it, but I've noticed over the years that typing in "best [insert restriction] recipe" brings up the better recipes. As with any new recipe, there's always a risk of picking a dud, but including "best" seems to help weed out the ho-hum options. You can search for things like: best gluten-free brownie recipe, best dairy-free white cake recipe, best easy vegan dinners, best nut-free and dairy-free desserts, etc. But *shhh*, don't let this tip get out or everyone will start saying their recipes are the best. NOTE: As much as this works, there are some things that are difficult to replicate with certain limitations. The recipes may exist, but they're likely going to require quite a few specialty ingredients.

When grocery shopping for your event, buy the smallest portion possible of your specialty ingredients. I know that sounds obvious, but the smallest portions won't be the ones at eye level or in the most intuitive places, because grocery stores want you to spend more money. For example, there are often smaller packages of 1:1 gluten-free flours on a higher or lower shelf (more info available on these flours in the Gluten-Free section). Another example is nut milks. The largest containers are kept in the cooler section with the regular milk, but nearly every store has smaller cartons elsewhere, usually near the baking or breakfast aisles. The smaller containers are much more likely to suit your onetime needs and are significantly less expensive. Be extra careful that you grab the correct flavor of milk, though. For baking and cooking, you'll want a milk alternative that says "Unsweetened Original" or something similar to avoid any that are sweetened or flavored. When buying smaller quantities, just make sure you're still getting enough for your recipe.

## Cost and Menu Planning

**Pro tip:** Phone apps like Fig, ShopWell – Better Food Choices, and Spoonful: Food Scanner can be great resources for checking if foods are safe for specific dietary restrictions. They work by scanning product barcodes, which means you can quickly check foods while you're at the store. The Fig app can be useful when eating out at restaurants, too. As a reminder, always verify with your guest that a food is safe for them, even if an app says it is. Your guest knows their limitations best.

Another way to save at the grocery store is to compare prices in your area, then go with the store that does price matching. Usually, all you need to provide is a current sales paper or even the other store's app that shows the lower price. And, of course, coupons are still a great option! You can often find coupons online by searching for "Coupon for [insert specific brand]," but make sure the coupon is still valid.



## Reasons behind Dietary Limitations

In life, people can have any number of reasons for doing what they do. The same holds true for a person's dietary limitations. But, in my experience, dietary restrictions generally stem from one or more of the things in this section. I want to point out that this information is meant to help build your knowledge base, not as a means to change or confront someone. Our goal is to create a place your guest enjoys being, not to prove how much we know or to correct them.

### Health Conditions

The most common reason for dietary limitations is some sort of health condition. It's absolutely possible to do your own research on your guest's condition, and I even encourage it if you're up for it, but I recognize how overwhelming the information can be. There's so much out there! And with each source, you have to ask: Is this information up to date? Is this reliable? How does all of this information apply to hosting someone in my home or at an event? I get it. This section is meant to relieve some of the burden of gathering reliable information. I've also included helpful links from sources you can trust if you'd like to learn more.

**ADDITIONAL DISCLAIMER:** This information is not exhaustive, and I am not a physician. You should not use this information to treat any medical condition; instead, always seek help from a trained medical professional.

## Celiac Disease

Celiac disease can go by a few names, but regardless of what you call it, it's an autoimmune disease where the immune system reacts to a protein called gluten.

Gluten is actually a group of proteins naturally found in wheat, barley, rye, and any hybrid of these three (including triticale, which is a wheat-rye hybrid). Gluten is what gives bread its structure, ability to rise, and its characteristic sponginess. Because of what it does in the food world, gluten can even be added as an individual ingredient to some processed foods. Since gluten is found in many things, including anything made with wheat flour, production equipment is often contaminated, even if the product itself doesn't contain gluten. An example of this is oatmeal. Oats are naturally gluten-free, but if they're processed on the same equipment as gluten-containing foods, or even grown in a field near gluten-containing crops, or in fields that once grew them, the oats can become contaminated.

For the person with celiac, gluten that enters the bloodstream from their digestive tract (which is a normal part of digestion) is seen as a foreign invader by their immune system. To protect the body from the perceived threat, the body rallies and . . . attacks itself. Strange, but true. This is called an autoimmune reaction. In celiac disease, the immune system attacks the itty-bitty finger-like projections in the small intestine (called villi and microvilli) that help the body absorb nutrients from food.

## Celiac Disease

If left untreated, meaning the person with celiac disease continues to consume gluten, those finger-like projections will be worn away, making it difficult or nearly impossible for them to absorb nutrients from their food. As you can imagine, that can lead to a very grim outcome.

For the most part, someone with celiac is extremely aware of when they've eaten something with gluten. However, that isn't always the case. Sometimes, the person with celiac doesn't know they've been exposed, but damage is done all the same.

Common symptoms of untreated celiac disease/exposure to gluten include fatigue, rashes, headache, unintended weight loss, gas, bloating, diarrhea, abdominal pain, and constipation. The only way for someone with celiac disease to prevent the damage and unpleasant symptoms is to eliminate gluten entirely. And thankfully, over time, the body can usually repair the damage that's been done.

Here are some helpful links with more information on celiac disease:

Celiac Disease Foundation

<https://celiac.org/>

National Celiac Association

<https://nationalceliac.org/about/>

## Diabetes

There are three main types of diabetes: type 1, type 2, and gestational. Diabetes is characterized by a body's inability to process carbohydrates properly. Carbohydrates are largely misunderstood in America. Most people are surprised to learn that carbs include more than baked goods and sweets; this food group also includes starches like rice, pasta, potatoes, corn, and even fiber. Yep, fiber is considered a carbohydrate; it's just one we aren't able to digest well, or at all, depending on the type. Because we don't break fiber down well, it can actually help slow the digestion and absorption of other carbohydrates, which means fiber-rich foods can be healthier options for diabetics.

After we eat and the nutrients from our food are absorbed, the body is supposed to release the hormone insulin, which allows our cells to accept the sugar molecules (called glucose) that are now in our blood. Without insulin acting as a key, our cells can't open the door, so to speak, which means they can't get the energy they need to function. Blood sugar levels that are consistently out of the normal range—high or low—can have permanent effects on the body.

Generally speaking, type 1 diabetics don't produce enough or any insulin, which means they have to inject it. Their cells then use the injected insulin to open the door to the sugar molecules in their blood. For type 1 diabetics, it's a delicate balance of eating the right ratios of healthy carbs and injecting the right amount of insulin. They're always trying to keep their blood sugar levels from getting too low *and* too high. It's a complicated system, but this should give you enough of an overview.

## Diabetes

Type 2 diabetics often produce enough insulin, but their cells don't recognize it, which is called insulin resistance. It's like they have the right keys, but the doors on their cells don't see them as fitting their locks. Typically, type 2 diabetics struggle more with high blood sugar levels than low ones. Many type 2 diabetics have to take medications, and sometimes even insulin, to regulate their levels. Some type 2 diabetics, however, are able to reach a place where they can manage their condition through diet and exercise.

Gestational diabetes only happens during pregnancy. It's possible for it to last beyond pregnancy, but the name is then changed to type 2 diabetes. In fact, many women who experience gestational diabetes while pregnant will go on to develop type 2 diabetes, even if their symptoms went away after delivery. Gestational diabetes is similar to type 2, which means these expectant moms struggle with high blood sugar levels. When left untreated, these high levels can cause harm to mom and baby.

Here's a helpful link with more info on diabetes, including the different types:

American Diabetes Association

<https://diabetes.org/>

### **Diverticulitis**

Diverticula are small pouches that can form in the lining of the large intestine (also known as the colon). When a person's colon develops these pouches, the condition is called diverticulosis. Many people have diverticulosis without ever knowing it, since it doesn't cause problems unless the pouches become inflamed or infected. If inflammation or infection do develop, it's called diverticulitis. The symptoms of diverticulitis include pain in the lower abdomen, nausea, vomiting, fever, and constipation.<sup>1</sup>

Up until recently, it was believed that small foods like seeds, nuts, popcorn, etc. were leading to diverticulitis by getting caught up in the pouches and festering there. There's growing evidence, however, that this isn't the case, and the foods previously thought unsafe are actually okay for those with the condition.<sup>2</sup>

Even though new evidence is emerging, there are still plenty of doctors and patients following the previous guidelines. If your guest is one of them, there's no need to challenge their thinking. They're simply following their doctor's recommendations, which is a good thing.

## Diverticulitis

Everyone with diverticulitis is a little different in how they approach their diet, so be sure to ask your guest with the condition if there are foods they need to avoid. Also, it's important to note that those with diverticulitis may need to be more selective with their diet when they're experiencing a flare up.

Here are two helpful links with more information on diverticulitis:

International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders

<https://iffgd.org/gi-disorders/diverticulosis-and-diverticulitis/>

Mayo Clinic

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diverticulitis/symptoms-causes/syc-20371758>

### **Food Intolerances, Sensitivities, and Allergies**

Food intolerance, food sensitivity, and food allergy are often used interchangeably by the public, but they aren't the same, and it's important to know the difference if your guest suffers from one of them. Chances are good that you know someone with one of these three issues.

**Food intolerances** are a result of the body being unable to break down the food in question. Intolerances can generate a severe reaction, but the immune system is not triggered. Each person with a food intolerance is unique in how their body responds, but some common symptoms are gas, bloating, diarrhea, constipation, abdominal pain, nausea, and vomiting. In nearly all cases, the food in question must be eliminated from the diet or eaten in very small quantities.

An example that most people have heard of is lactose intolerance (more info on this in the Dairy-Free and Lactose-Free section below). Lactose is the sugar found in dairy products, and someone with lactose intolerance needs to avoid it, in part or in whole, to prevent any of the uncomfortable, and often embarrassing, symptoms listed above.

Another lesser-known example is fructose intolerance. Fructose is a simple sugar found in fruit, honey, agave, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, and even some vegetables. There are actually two types of fructose intolerance, and the type a person has will determine the foods they can and can't eat.<sup>4</sup>

**Food sensitivities** may or may not involve the immune system (there's a bit of a debate). The severity of reaction varies from person to person, but they cannot result in anaphylaxis. Someone with a food sensitivity may say something like, “[insert food] doesn't agree with me.” They could experience headaches, rashes, increased acne, bloating, inflammation, joint pain, etc. Depending on their reaction to the food in question, they may continue eating it, because, to them, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. But the choice to do so is up to that person. It's best not to assume your guest will be okay eating something they're sensitive to simply because they've done so in the past.

An example of an ingredient that many people are sensitive to is MSG (monosodium glutamate), which is an additive used as a flavor enhancer in processed foods, many Asian foods, and even in some Mexican restaurants. Many people report anywhere from mild headaches to severe migraines after consuming MSG. Some people are even sensitive to MSG-like compounds found naturally in some foods. This is also a good example of differing severity.

Another example is artificial dyes, which are common in everything from food to medications to makeup. There is increasing evidence that artificial food dyes may negatively affect some children's behavior and can intensify the behaviors associated with autism and ADHD (also known as ADD).<sup>3</sup> These dyes have been linked to other health concerns as well. As a result, many people are choosing to eliminate these dyes from their diets.

## Food Intolerances, Sensitivities, and Allergies

**Food allergies** are the most severe of the three limitations in this category. This form of limitation undoubtedly involves the immune system and has the potential to be life-threatening. The severity of reaction varies from person to person, but common symptoms include digestive problems like diarrhea, vomiting, and abdominal cramping; skin issues like hives, swelling, and itching; and even anaphylaxis, which is a full-body allergic reaction that can be deadly. This isn't meant to cause fear, but it's important that you understand the stakes for someone with a food allergy.

It's possible to be allergic to nearly any food, but the nine most common food allergens, known as the major nine, are eggs, fish, milk, peanuts, sesame, shellfish, soy, tree nuts, and wheat (important info discussed further in the Food Allergies section below). If someone expresses that they have a food allergy, it's important to communicate with them about it. Of course, you want to ensure they have a pleasant and safe experience, no matter what, but if there's risk of anaphylaxis, you'll want to know ahead of time so you can better prepare. I offer guidance on how to approach this conversation in the Questions to Ask Beforehand section in Part II.

Here are two helpful links with more info on food intolerances, sensitivities, and allergies:

Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE)

<https://www.foodallergy.org/>

International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders

<https://iffgd.org/gi-disorders/food-allergies/>

### **Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)**

It may surprise you to know there are actually many types of irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), and they all have different, but sometimes overlapping, symptoms. Generally speaking, IBS is characterized by gas, bloating, abdominal pain, diarrhea, and/or constipation. These symptoms are usually triggered by certain foods and stress, so the condition can often be managed (but not eliminated) by diet and exercise.

Unfortunately, this condition isn't well understood.

Those who struggle with IBS often feel like their body is against them because their triggers can seem so random. A food that was safe yesterday may cause issues today and vice versa, which can cause anxiety, especially when it comes to eating at events. Once a person with IBS identifies their trigger foods, they usually avoid them, but this process requires trial and error.

But because IBS is often unpredictable and can be very embarrassing, not many people will openly admit to having the condition. Instead, they may say they have dietary limitations and leave it at that. When prompted to give more information, they may simply say certain foods cause them digestive issues or make them sick. It's important not to pry when someone is careful about not sharing certain details. They may not feel safe or comfortable talking about it, and it's important to respect that.

Here's a helpful link with more info on IBS:

International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders

<https://iffgd.org/gi-disorders/irritable-bowel-syndrome/>

### **Religious Practices**

Many religions have dietary limitations. Even so, simply because someone practices a certain religion doesn't automatically mean they follow the dietary guidelines, so it's best to ask. For the purposes of this guide, we'll briefly cover the statistically most common religions. Please remember that even though religious dietary limitations stem from a moral conviction, they're no less important to your guest. If you're unsure how to approach this conversation about dietary limitations with your guest, check out the Questions to Ask Beforehand section of Part II.

Several of the religions discussed in this section involve fasting leading up to, on, or during different holidays or observances. That doesn't mean you can't still host these guests at your event. Your role as host would simply shift from serving them food to supporting them. This looks like not drawing attention to their fast and being aware of when they're feeling uncomfortable around other guests. If you notice your guest growing uneasy with questions about why they aren't eating, help steer the conversation elsewhere. Revisit the Feeling Seen without Feeling Stared At section for tips on how to do this well. Ultimately, even if a guest you invite is fasting, they likely still desire to be included, so I encourage you to extend the invitation and help them feel as normal as possible.

## Religious Practices

**Buddhists** (Buddhism) do not have strict dietary limitations, but the religion seeks to do no harm. As a result, many Buddhists choose to be vegetarians, specifically lacto-vegetarians, which means they'll eat dairy products in addition to their vegetarian diet.<sup>5</sup> See the Vegetarian and Vegan section below for more info on vegetarian diets.

**Catholics** who observe Lent will avoid eating red meat and poultry on Ash Wednesday and all Fridays during the forty days leading up to Easter. Things like eggs, dairy, fish, and shellfish are acceptable during this time, though.<sup>6</sup> Since the date of Easter changes from year to year, you'll want to check a calendar to see if your spring event lands within Lent. And since Lenten restrictions, including fasting, are age-specific and for those in good health, you'll want to check with your guest about their dietary needs.

**Christians** don't have dietary restrictions unless they choose to. For example, some Christians may choose to avoid alcohol, not eat bacon, follow a vegetarian diet, or comply with the Jewish dietary laws, but these are all personal choices.

**Hindus** (Hinduism) seek to avoid doing harm, especially to animals, and revere cows as sacred. As a result, most Hindus are lacto-vegetarians, which means they'll eat dairy products in addition to their vegetarian diet, since collecting milk doesn't harm the cow. Different sects within Hinduism allow for different foods, so check with your guest to learn what foods they avoid.<sup>5</sup> See the Vegetarian and Vegan section below for more info on vegetarian diets.

## Religious Practices

**Jehovah's Witnesses** do not eat blood but have no other restrictions. This means they only eat meat from animals whose blood was properly drained. The remaining blood in meat, especially red meat, is not an issue unless the animal was not properly slaughtered. By avoiding the consumption of blood, Jehovah's Witnesses also avoid things like blood sausage, blood soup, and black pudding.<sup>7</sup>

**Jews** (Judaism) have many year-round dietary restrictions and additional limitations during certain religious feasts. Food that meets Jewish dietary laws is called kosher. A Jewish priest or authorized individual must be the one to slaughter an animal in accordance with specific rules in order for the meat to be considered kosher.<sup>8</sup> Some foods and ingredients are never allowed, such as pork, shellfish, rabbits/hares, blood, and more. Meat and dairy can be eaten separately but are not allowed in the same dish. Nor are the utensils, pots, or pans used to cook meat allowed to be used to cook anything containing dairy and vice versa. Certain alcohols are considered kosher, but not all.<sup>9</sup> The things I've mentioned here are only an overview of the Jewish dietary laws. These limitations can feel like a lot for a host, but don't let them scare you. There are many prepackaged kosher items, and your guest will be your best resource to answer any questions.

## Religious Practices

**Mormons** (Mormonism/Latter-Day Saints) avoid things that could alter their state of mind, including “hot drinks” (which have been defined by their church as being coffee and tea), alcohol, tobacco, and, of course, illegal drugs.<sup>10</sup> Since there’s been confusion or a lack of clarity surrounding the consumption of caffeine (coffee, tea, hot chocolate, soda, etc.), it’s best to ask your guest what limitations they observe. Similarly, drinking alcohol isn’t allowed, but your guest may or may not be okay eating alcohol that has been cooked into something, including the use of flavored extracts, such as vanilla, in baking. So again, clarify these things with your guest ahead of time.

**Muslims** (Islam) have many year-round restrictions. Dietary laws require all food that Muslims eat to meet halal standards. This, of course, includes the way an animal is slaughtered.<sup>11</sup> Pork, blood, and alcohol are not allowed in any form.<sup>12</sup> Vegetarian and vegan foods are often safe for Muslims to eat, but not always, so it’s best to check the ingredients. For example, flavored extracts, such as vanilla, are usually made using alcohol, as are many soy sauces.<sup>13</sup> Foods containing these items would not meet halal standards. Many Jewish kosher items also meet halal standards unless they also contain alcohol.<sup>5</sup> Your Muslim guest will be your best resource when it comes to menu planning and understanding which ingredients are safe to use.

### **Choice of Conscience**

Aside from health conditions and religious convictions, many people make the choice to eliminate or limit things in their diet. There are countless reasons a person may choose this lifestyle, but I've included a few common ones below.

**Health-conscious individuals** may avoid processed foods, items high in unhealthy fats or sugar, foods that cause inflammation, etc. They could be trying to improve their cholesterol, lose weight, or simply like the way they feel when they eat healthy.

**Morally convicted individuals** may avoid unethically raised or unethically slaughtered meat, may not eat animal products at all, may choose not to buy unethically sourced food that was grown using forced labor or underpaid workers, etc. They often want to be one less person supporting the practices they don't agree with and are trying to make their corner of the world a better place.

**Self-sufficiency-minded individuals** choose to produce as much of their own food as possible. They may have a vegetable, fruit, and/or herb garden or grow crops, raise animals, keep bees, etc. Often, they're trying to leave a smaller footprint and source things locally, whenever possible.

**Sustainability-minded individuals** may choose to eliminate highly processed foods, certain hard-to-make products, or things that take a toll on the environment. Each person will have a different view on this, but they see the health of the planet as something worth the inconvenience to themselves. They often want to leave the world a better place than they found it.

### **Common Dietary Limitations**

When you're preparing to host someone with a dietary limitation, no matter what that limitation is, it's best to approach each step as though they could have a severe reaction. This isn't meant to increase stress or anxiety, but it can be a helpful way to stay alert and prevent mishaps like cross contact, which we'll explore in three of the sections below.

Many people live by the idea that what a person doesn't know won't hurt them, but I'm here to say that when it comes to food, nothing could be further from the truth. Everyone is different in how strictly they adhere to their dietary needs, but the last thing you want as a host is for you or someone else working with the food to brush off someone's limitation.

As the host, I'm sure it's your goal to help the person with special dietary needs feel loved, welcome, and safe. That means taking certain steps to ensure a positive experience for everyone. And just know, it's rather common for someone with a limitation to paint their needs as less important than they really are to keep from being a burden or an inconvenience to you. This is why it's important to take all limitations seriously and to come alongside your guest in a way that helps them feel safe and validated.

### **Dairy-Free and Lactose-Free**

#### **Dairy-Free vs. Lactose-Free**

A dairy-free diet and a lactose-free diet are not the same thing. If someone is dairy-free, they are, by default, lactose-free, but the opposite is not true. Someone who is dairy-free won't consume any dairy. But someone who is lactose-free may choose to eat dairy items that have been altered to be lactose-free or items that are naturally low in lactose. And to clear up any potential confusion, "dairy" in the food industry primarily refers to cow's milk.

The most common reasons for being dairy-free or lactose-free are lactose intolerance, a milk protein allergy, or because the person is vegan. But there are other less common reasons. For example, nursing moms often go dairy-free if their infant can't tolerate the dairy that makes its way into the breastmilk from mom's diet. Others may go dairy-free to make things easier if someone else in the home is dairy-free.

Lactose intolerance is likely the most known reason for a dairy-free diet. Lactose is the sugar found in mammals' milk, including cow and goat. It isn't a very sweet sugar, but it's a form of sugar, nonetheless.

## Dairy-Free vs. Lactose-Free

Someone who is lactose intolerant doesn't produce enough of an enzyme called lactase, which is the enzyme responsible for breaking down lactose. Digestive enzymes are needed to break larger things into smaller, individual components so the body can absorb the most basic forms of the nutrients in our food. Without the enzyme lactase available to properly break down the sugar, bacteria consume the lactose and produce gasses as a byproduct. Lactose intolerance is not harmful to the person, but they'll experience very unpleasant symptoms if they consume the sugar (symptoms are discussed more in the Food Intolerance section).

Lactose intolerance varies in severity. One person may be fine with small amounts of certain hard cheeses or yogurt, since these products are naturally lower in lactose, while another person may need to completely avoid dairy. There are over-the-counter pills that contain the enzyme lactase. Some people with lactose intolerance find these pills helpful, others don't. It's also possible that someone who can't tolerate cow's milk may be able to tolerate small amounts of goat's milk, but this isn't always—or even usually—the case. Each person is unique.

There are many food items that are lactose-free without being dairy-free. These are dairy-based products that have had the lactose broken down. For example, you can find lactose-free ice cream, lactose-free cow's milk, lactose-free coffee creamer, lactose-free cheese, and even lactose-free cream cheese. These products will still contain dairy, just not the lactose (or at least very little of it, since some may remain).

## Dairy-Free vs. Lactose-Free

A guest with a milk protein allergy cannot have dairy in any capacity. While they may experience gut-related symptoms if exposed to dairy, there's also a chance they could experience anaphylaxis. They should know whether or not this is the case for them. Like with all dietary restrictions, it's best to never assume your guest can consume small amounts of the ingredient they avoid.

If lactose-free dairy products aren't an option for your guest, you'll need to use dairy alternatives like nut milks, margarine, and vegan cheeses. While there are many dairy-free products on the market, they are not all equal in taste or quality. As a result, many people who follow a dairy-free diet choose to avoid these alternatives. However, the common exception is a milk substitute, since milk is such an important part of cooking and baking. Thankfully, dairy-free products have come a long way in the last few years, and more and more stores are carrying things like dairy and cheese alternatives and dairy-free ice creams, desserts, breads, and snacks.

**Pro tip:** My top pick for vegan cheese products is Violife. Two other companies many people like are Daiya and Kite Hill. There are likely other good brands, but without knowing what they taste like or how they respond to cooking, I can't say whether they're a good option or not. Many brand websites allow you to search for stores in your area that carry their products. No matter what, I suggest asking your guest what products they prefer, since that's what they'll feel comfortable with.

**Pro tip:** When buying a nut milk or a milk substitute, pay close attention to the type you're buying. In nearly all cases of baking and cooking, you'll want one that says something like "Unsweetened Original" (to avoid sweetened or flavored varieties), unless the recipe specifies otherwise. It can be really easy to get the wrong kind, and no one wants to get to the prep stage and realize they can't use the vanilla-flavored almond milk in their gravy. Been there, done that! Also, make sure you're getting as little as you need (revisit the Cost and Menu Planning section above for more tips on this).

### **Food Production and Food Labels**

Cow's milk is one of the major nine allergens, so it's required to be prominently listed on food labels. This applies to milk derivatives, too, which we'll touch on in a minute.

**Lactose-free** products will say whether they're lactose-free as part of their packaging. Trust me, they'll want you to know their product is lactose-free. Just remember, when you read the food label, it will still list cow's milk as an ingredient, because lactose-free does not mean dairy-free.

**Dairy-free** products will also usually let you know they're dairy-free, since they'll be marketing to a specific group of people. If something is labeled dairy-free, it should not contain any form of cow's milk.

**Non-dairy** is the term you want to avoid if your guest is lactose- or dairy-free. The FDA (Food & Drug Administration) allows products to be labeled as non-dairy even when they contain milk derivatives, which are proteins, solids, fats, etc. that are isolated from milk. A good example is powdered coffee creamer, which is often labeled as non-dairy, even though it contains a form of the milk protein casein. Casein and whey are two of the proteins found in cow's milk, and they're often added to other foods, especially protein powders and workout supplements. While companies say casein and whey derivatives are lactose-free, some people with lactose intolerance will still need to avoid them. And, of course, anyone with a milk allergy will need to avoid casein and whey completely.

### **Ingredients and Cross Contact**

\*Cross contact is where an allergen, *or in this case dairy*, is added to a *dairy-free* food or ingredient by accident during some step in prep, production, or service. If cross contact happens, the food is considered contaminated, but this isn't the same thing as cross contamination. Instead, cross contamination is a food safety term that refers to bacteria or other harmful substances being passed from one ingredient to another by accident. Cross contamination is an important issue, and should always be avoided, but our concern here is with cross contact. It's common for people, even those with dietary limitations, to incorrectly use cross contact and cross contamination interchangeably. I say this so you'll know what your guest means if they unintentionally use the wrong term.

## Ingredients and Cross Contact

I see dairy cross contact all the time at events. The biggest culprits are serving utensils that are used in multiple dishes and dressings or dips that accidentally contaminate other foods. A good example is a veggie tray, where ranch dressing or another dairy-based dressing is placed at the center. The dip is often dribbled all over the vegetables or the tongs have been dunked in the dressing. While the guest with lactose intolerance may be able to compromise and select the veggies that don't appear to have dressing on them, the guest with a milk allergy will probably have to pass completely. This can be especially frustrating and hard, because fresh fruits and vegetables are often some of the safest items at events. And truthfully, this kind of mistake, no matter how innocent, can cause a guest with a limitation to feel overlooked, unimportant, isolated, and anxious.

Something that doesn't necessarily fall under cross contact—since it isn't an accident, even though it may be done without thinking—is when butter or milk are brushed on top of baked goods or when these ingredients are used in icings, crumbles, or toppings. It can be easy to forget these things are a no-go when it comes to a dairy-free diet.

Using dairy-free ingredients in every step of food prep and service is crucial. For many people, adding butter to dishes is almost second nature, but these unintentional slips can have real implications for your guest. And as we'll see in the next section, dairy is often found where you least expect it. Every ingredient and product must be checked for dairy and its derivatives. Staying fully aware of what you're doing in the kitchen will help reduce the risk of accidentally using the wrong ingredient.

### Surprising Sources of Dairy

Okay, we've discussed the difference between dairy-free, lactose-free, and non-dairy and why certain people may avoid dairy completely. We've also covered the risk of cross contact in the kitchen and at events. But there's something else we need to talk about: dairy and milk derivatives can be hidden in some odd places and in some not-so-obvious ways on ingredient lists.

But before we look at the lists below, it's important that I point out that not all margarines are dairy-free. That seems strange, right? Margarine, after all, is used as a butter substitute. While that's true, many brands actually add milk derivatives, like whey, to their margarine to make them more butter-like. This is another example of why there are no safe assumptions when it comes to dietary restrictions. Now that we've covered that, we can get to the lists.

Dairy and its derivatives are common in things like:

- Bouillon cubes/powder and some broths
- Breads and bread coatings
- Candies
- Canned soups and sauces
- Caramel, mocha, and toffee flavoring/drizzles
- Chips and crackers (Doritos; most cheese, sour cream, and ranch items; some vinegar and sea salt flavors; etc.)
- Croutons

## Surprising Sources of Dairy

- Flavored popcorn
- Milk chocolate, white chocolate, and even some dark chocolate
- Pudding
- Pumpkin spice drink mixes
- Ramen noodle flavor packets
- Salad dressings, including some vinegarettes
- Sherbet (not to be confused with sorbet)
- Some margarines
- Specialty/flavored coffee or tea drinks
- Store-bought breadcrumbs

Ingredients or foods that may include dairy without you knowing:<sup>14</sup>

- Alcohols made with milk derivatives, including some beers and wines
- Casein, caseinate, casein hydrolysate, etc.
- Lactose, lactulose, lactate, lactic acid starter culture (but not lactic acid)
- Milk solids, milk fat, milk powder, and the like
- Some chewing gums and mints (and even toothpastes)
- Whey, whey isolate, whey protein, etc.

These are NOT exhaustive lists. But they show you how tricky it can be to spot dairy-containing ingredients on a food label. My best advice is to stick to the items that are labeled dairy-free or ask your guest if a food appears safe for them. When in doubt, don't use a questionable ingredient.

### Utensils and Supplies

If you're preparing something dairy-free in a kitchen that typically uses dairy, you'll want to know the extent of your guest's limitation. A milk allergy that results in anaphylaxis will require more precautionary steps than a lactose intolerance or a vegan diet, even though all three should be taken seriously. If your guest does have an allergy, talk with them about what extra steps you might need to take. I also provide some general suggestions in the Food Allergy section below. But because I discuss food allergies elsewhere, this section will primarily focus on lactose intolerance.

Of course, clean dishes are still necessary for someone with a lactose intolerance, but they may not need to be as meticulously washed as they would for someone with an allergy. That being said, washing the dishes and utensils you plan to use, whether by hand or in the dishwasher, should be sufficient.

\*Also, something not many people think twice about—but can be a source of cross contact—is cooking *dairy-containing* foods and *dairy-free foods* on the same surface. This could be a grill, griddle, panini press, skillet, etc.—anything that may not get thoroughly cleaned between or after each use. You'll want to make sure the surface has been washed with soap and water. (Yes, this even includes the grill rack. Many people think turning the temperature up really high cleans the surface, but this is not an effective way to remove *dairy or lactose*. The only way to get rid of *dairy and lactose* is to remove them, since they aren't like bacteria that can be killed.) Then always cook the *dairy-free* food first and store it somewhere it can be kept warm while the rest of the food is prepared. It's so easy for foods to accidentally touch when they're being cooked at the same time, so it's best to cook a guest's specialty foods separately and before the rest of the food.

## Utensils and Supplies

\*But carefully cleaned utensils are only part of the process of hosting someone with a dietary limitation. On the day of your event, serving utensils can't be allowed to pass from *dairy-containing* dishes to *dairy-free* ones. I know this may seem like a daunting task, but there are ways to reduce the risk of it happening by having systems in place. Those systems are important because once a dish is contaminated with *dairy*, your guest with a *dairy* restriction can no longer safely eat it, which can be hard and stressful for both you and your guest. We'll talk about this in more detail in the Preparing to Serve the Food section in Part II.

Here are a couple of helpful links with more information on the basics of a dairy-free diet:

Vegan.com (NOTE: This website has good information, but it is rather opinionated)

<https://vegan.com/info/dairy-free/>

Very Well Health

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/dairy-free-diet-5216769>

### **Food Allergies**

This section covers hosting someone with a food allergy, but the principles also apply to those with a food sensitivity or food intolerance. Unfortunately, food intolerances, sensitivities, and/or allergies often come in multiples. With food allergies, very small amounts of the allergen can trigger an immune response, so it's best not to assume there's a safe amount. All of this can make food prep a little more challenging, but it's absolutely doable. It'll just require a little more planning.

As mentioned in the Food Intolerances, Sensitivities, and Allergies section above, it's possible to be allergic to nearly any food, and reactions to the allergens vary widely. But currently, the FDA (Food & Drug Administration) focuses on the top nine food allergens, called the major nine allergens, which include eggs, fish, milk, peanuts, sesame, shellfish, soy, tree nuts, and wheat. Sesame was added to the previous major eight list on January 1, 2023.<sup>15</sup>

Since anaphylaxis is possible with food allergies, it's important to use extra caution if your guest has a food allergy. It's okay to ask your guest about the severity of their reaction, but these questions need to be handled well. See the Questions to Ask Beforehand section in Part II for more on this.

### **Food Production and Food Labels**

By US law, food labels must disclose whether their product contains, or could contain, any of the major nine allergens. That's why you'll see the nine allergens listed in bold in ingredient lists and/or at the bottom of the labels. But as is discussed in the gluten and dairy sections, ingredients can go by other names. This means that the ingredient may not show up under its rightful name, but, according to law, if the source of the ingredient is from one of the major nine allergens, its origin will either be put in parentheses following the ingredient or in the "contains" list. For example, lactose would be seen as "lactose (milk)" or at the bottom of the label as "Contains milk." Currently, food manufacturers are only required to do one of the two methods, but some choose to do both.

But what do you do when it comes to a food allergy that isn't a part of the major nine? Well, that's where things get tricky. The best course of action is to ask your guest which ingredients and products they can safely consume.

A related topic that you may be wondering about is the "may contain" list on food labels. This list is not required by law, but some manufacturers choose to voluntarily put it on their labels. Essentially, it means that the equipment used to produce the item could be contaminated by the allergen(s) listed. The severity of your guest's allergy will determine if products like these are safe, so check with your guest before buying the item in question.

### **Ingredients and Cross Contact**

\*Cross contact is where an allergen is added to an *allergen-free* food or ingredient by accident during some step in prep, production, or service. If cross contact happens, the food is considered contaminated, but this isn't the same thing as cross contamination. Instead, cross contamination is a food safety term that refers to bacteria or other harmful substances being passed from one ingredient to another by accident. Cross contamination is an important issue, and should always be avoided, but our concern here is with cross contact. It's common for people, even those with dietary limitations, to incorrectly use cross contact and cross contamination interchangeably. I say this so you'll know what your guest means if they unintentionally use the wrong term.

Cross contact is especially important when dealing with food allergies, since the smallest mix up—that may go unnoticed until it's too late—can result in your guest being exposed. This isn't meant to frighten you, but simply to raise awareness.

To avoid cross contact in the kitchen or at the table, you'll want to make sure many of your ingredients are new. Even if your butter or condiment doesn't contain the allergen, it doesn't mean the allergen hasn't been introduced through normal use. For example, breadcrumbs—and therefore several potential allergens—being in the butter or margarine from buttering your toast. Another example is baking supplies like flour, sugar, baking powder, etc. if you've dipped contaminated utensils inside their containers.

## Ingredients and Cross Contact

The best way to avoid cross contact is to stay focused, aware, and intentional when cooking or baking for your event. We all have an autopilot mode, especially in the kitchen, but you'll need to avoid slipping into it.

**\*Pro tip:** Take a look at the ingredients you need for your dish. Think through which items of yours have come into contact with *the allergen in question*. Then simply buy new ones of those items or use previously untouched sources, *like excess flour that's still in the bag*, rather than what's in the canisters or containers on your countertop or in your cupboards. Things like a new stick of butter or tub of margarine will be needed for your guest when you sit down to eat, so the items won't go to waste.

Using allergen-free ingredients in every step of food prep and service is crucial. Accidental slips can have serious implications for your guest, especially if anaphylaxis is involved. And as we'll see in the next section, the major nine allergens are often found where you least expect them. Every ingredient and product needs to be checked for the allergens and their derivatives. Staying fully aware of what you're doing in the kitchen will help reduce the risk of accidentally using the wrong ingredient.

### **Surprising Sources of the Major Nine Allergens**

Including surprising sources for each of the major nine allergens would take up more space than we have in this guide, so, instead, I've included some helpful links from FARE.org (Food Allergy Research and Education) explaining places the major nine allergens can hide. The “Avoiding [insert allergen]” dropdown—located further down each page—is especially helpful when it comes to food prep and reading food labels.

Eggs

<https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/egg>

Fish

<https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/fish>

Milk

<https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/milk>

Peanuts

<https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/peanut>

Sesame

<https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/sesame>

### Shellfish

<https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/shellfish>

### Soy

<https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/soy>

### Tree nuts

<https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/tree-nut>

### Wheat

<https://www.foodallergy.org/living-food-allergies/food-allergy-essentials/common-allergens/wheat>

## **Utensils and Supplies**

The utensils and supplies used to prepare food for someone with a food allergy need to be thoroughly cleaned. For allergens, the FDA recommends washing dishware, cookware, and utensils in the dishwasher or with very hot soapy water (with a new sponge!) and allowing the dishes to air dry.<sup>16</sup> Focus especially on cleaning any rims, rivets, corners, between prongs on forks, etc. Although the information from the FDA is directed toward retail operations, the principals remain the same, and you can read more about their recommendations here: <https://www.fda.gov/food/retail-food-protection/allergen-removal-and-transfer-using-wiping-and-cleaning-methods-retail-food-establishments>.

## Utensils and Supplies

Wooden spoons are porous and scratch easily, which means they're notorious for harboring microscopic food particles. The same is true for wooden cutting boards. Rubber spatulas that are damaged and past their prime can also trap food particles.

**\*Pro tip:** Instead of wooden spoons and worn spatulas, use stainless steel/metal whisks or forks to do your stirring. Stainless steel pots and pans or glass are your best option for cookware and bakeware, as non-stick items can also become scratched and harbor *allergens*. *Follow the FDA's recommendations when cleaning any utensil you plan to use.* Unfortunately, even if you follow the cleaning recommendations, utensils with multiple parts or hard-to-clean places like ice cream/batter scoops, colanders, and strainers may not be safe to use if your guest has a severe *allergy*, since these items can be too hard to clean properly. This could present a problem if you need to drain noodles or strain something, but these utensils may be too hard to clean well enough. Using a lid to drain the food or scooping it out with a slotted spoon or tongs may be the best option, but do this once the water has cooled. (Be extra cautious while the water is hot!)

Before you begin any food prep, you'll want to use hot soapy water and a new sponge to wipe down your kitchen surfaces. This includes your stovetop, countertops, island, tables, etc., even if you don't think you'll use the space, since you may need to set things out of the way if your countertops get crowded. Also, when dealing with food allergies, prep all allergen-free foods before moving on to the rest of your menu. This will further prevent cross contact.

## Utensils and Supplies

**\*Pro tip:** To further limit cross contact that could occur from using silverware and dishware that haven't been thoroughly cleaned, you can consider using disposable versions. Try searching for “elegant disposable dinnerware” or “upscale disposable silverware” to find elegant options if your event calls for a more fashionable touch. The disposable option does create more waste, but it also lowers the risk of your guest being exposed to the offending ingredient and makes cleanup a lot easier. As a word of caution, be sure the dishes you choose are meant for food, since some are meant for decoration only.

\*Also, something not many people think twice about—but can be a source of cross contact—is cooking *allergen-containing* foods and *allergen-free* foods on the same surface. This could be a grill, griddle, panini press, skillet, etc.—anything that may not get thoroughly cleaned between or after each use. You'll want to make sure the surface has been washed with soap and water. (Yes, this even includes the grill rack. Many people think turning the temperature up really high cleans the surface, but this is not an effective way to remove *an allergen*. The only way to get rid of *allergens* is to remove them, since they aren't like bacteria that can be killed.) Then always cook the *allergen-free* food first and store it somewhere it can be kept warm while the rest of the food is prepared. It's so easy for foods to accidentally touch when cooking food at the same time, so it's best to cook a guest's specialty foods separately and before the rest of the food.

## Utensils and Supplies

\*But as important as carefully cleaned utensils and surfaces are for your guest with a *food allergy*, they're only part of the process. On the day of your event, serving utensils can't be allowed to pass from *allergen-containing* dishes to *allergen-free* ones. I know this may seem like an impossible task, but there are ways to limit the risk of it happening. And it's so important that you have systems in place, because once a dish is contaminated with *an allergen*, your guest with the restriction can no longer safely eat it, which can be hard and stressful for both you and your guest. We'll talk about this in more detail in the Preparing to Serve the Food section in Part II.

## **Gluten-Free**

### **Choosing a Recipe and Gluten-Free Flour**

There are different reasons people follow a gluten-free diet. For some, it's because of celiac disease (see the Celiac Disease subsection of the Health Conditions section above). For others, they simply feel better when they avoid gluten. For others still, they have a wheat allergy or sensitivity, and it's simply easier to avoid gluten altogether. When preparing for someone on a gluten-free diet, it's best to never assume a little bit won't hurt them.

Check with your guest about the severity of their limitation (see the Questions to Ask Beforehand section in Part II), but plan as though they need to completely avoid gluten. This will keep you from going into autopilot mode in the kitchen, thereby better protecting the person you're hosting and allowing for the safest experience.

Before preparing anything for someone that follows a gluten-free diet, I suggest talking with them about their limitation. If they're so sensitive to gluten that they have to use dedicated gluten-free pots, pans, utensils, etc., it may be best to simply ask how you can support them while they're at your event or in your home. They're the expert on their limitation, so if they say there's not much you can do as far as food prep goes, offer to help in another way, like creating a clean space for them to dish up or store their food, helping them keep their food safe from cross contact, and making them feel as included and safe as possible (more on this in Part II). Once you understand your guest's limitation, you can better decide how to host them well.

## Choosing a Recipe and Gluten-Free Flour

If you feel you'd like to bake or cook something for your gluten-free guest, and you've gotten their approval to do so, there are some things you'll want to consider. The best thing to do is find a recipe your guest feels comfortable with. As wonderful as surprises can be, they're not appropriate when it comes to dietary limitations. Your heart may be in the right place if you have dreams of revealing something special that you made for them, but I know from experience that they'll be stuck between wondering if it's truly safe for them to eat and not wanting to hurt your feelings. It's best not to put them in that situation. Instead, find a recipe you'd like to try, and send it to them. A recipe that has already been altered to be gluten-free will be the easiest to make. But if you'd like to try your hand at altering a recipe that contains gluten, tell your guest what you plan to use as a substitute. Let them be as involved as they choose to be.

Once you've picked out a gluten-free recipe, you'll likely need to choose a flour substitute. But one of the biggest obstacles to gluten-free cooking and baking is selecting the right flours, because not all gluten-free flours are the same. Not by a long shot. When you go to the baking aisle or the gluten-free section of the store, you'll find a ton of flour options—white rice, brown rice, quinoa, oat, hemp, different kinds of starches and gums, etc. It can be so overwhelming if you don't know what you're looking for. But don't panic! We'll get through this together.

All the individual flours (like rice, oat, quinoa, etc.) can be left for more experienced bakers and cooks. Those flours have their place, but they're expensive and not a good option for a once-in-a-while gluten-free baker or cook. **I can't stress this enough: individual flours will not be a suitable substitute for regular wheat flour.**

## Choosing a Recipe and Gluten-Free Flour

For a wheat flour substitute, you'll want a flour mixture that is considered a one-to-one replacement. This 1:1 ratio means that you should, in most recipes, be able to replace the required wheat flour with the same amount of the 1:1 gluten-free flour. These flour mixes contain different flours, starches, and gums in the right ratios to mimic wheat flour as closely as possible. There are many good brands of 1:1 gluten-free flour mixes on the market. Some common ones are Bob's Red Mill, Cup4Cup (their multipurpose flour contains dairy), King Arthur, Namaste, and Pillsbury. Personally, I use Bob's Red Mill, but I hear good things about the other brands, especially Namaste. Availability may be the biggest factor in which flour you choose.

It's important to know ahead of time that even though 1:1 gluten-free flours can be used in place of wheat flour in most recipes, they won't behave exactly the same. Gluten is largely responsible for the structure, rise, and sponginess of baked goods (more on this in the Celiac Disease subsection of the Health Conditions section above). Gluten-free flour mixes do their best to mimic traditional flours, but they can only do so much. This is why gluten-free products are often dense and don't rise as well.

**Pro tip:** Ask the person you're hosting which brand of flour they prefer using and use that brand. Then when you're done baking or cooking, you can bless them with the excess. (Unless, of course, you plan on hosting them often enough that you'd like to keep it on hand or experiment with it.)

## Choosing a Recipe and Gluten-Free Flour

**Pro tip:** Gluten-free recipes will often specify which 1:1 gluten-free flour they used when making the dish, and they'll often say they haven't tried the recipe with other flours. Usually, this is to protect themselves from backlash if someone tries the recipe with a different flour and has abnormal results. In my experience, you can usually use the 1:1 gluten-free flour brands interchangeably, but if a recipe is very adamant about using a specific flour, skip it unless it's the brand you were already planning on using.

Many companies sell gluten-free pre-made mixes for things like brownies, cakes, cookies, etc. These may be a great option for you to use, but you'll still want to make sure your guest approves of the ingredients. If this is the route you go, please still read the Ingredients and Cross Contact and Utensils and Supplies sections below before making your gluten-free item.

### Food Production and Food Labels

As discussed in the Celiac Disease section above, gluten is a group of proteins found in wheat, barley, rye, and their hybrids, such as triticale, which is a wheat-rye hybrid. Gluten is what gives bread its signature rise, sponginess, and structure. Because of gluten's ability to add structure and cohesion, it's even added as a separate ingredient to some processed foods. Since gluten is found in so many things, including anything made with wheat flour, food-production equipment is often contaminated. This means that even if the food being produced doesn't contain gluten, it could be contaminated with it by the machinery. A common example of this is oats, which are naturally gluten-free but can become contaminated while being grown, harvested, processed, or made into food.

Food manufacturers are **not** required by law to list if something contains gluten. You may have seen wheat separated out on an ingredient list, but that's because it's one of the major nine allergens. It has nothing to do with the fact that wheat contains gluten. Since barley and rye are not part of the major nine food allergens, they don't require any special acknowledgement.

And since food manufacturers are also not required by law to list whether the food was produced in a facility with, or on the same equipment as, gluten-containing products, people who are following a gluten-free diet cannot go by ingredients alone. Some companies, primarily on gluten-free products, may say something like "Not produced in a gluten-free facility," but this type of statement isn't required by law; it's a courtesy, or, more likely, a way of legally protecting the company.

## Food Production and Food Labels

So what does this mean when you're looking at a food label? Well, some foods don't contain wheat, barley, or rye, but they also aren't labeled as being gluten-free. This is usually the result of two possible scenarios: First, the company didn't want to go through the process of having their product tested to see if it meets the government's standards for gluten-free products (more on this below). Second, the company knows their machinery is contaminated with gluten from other foods, which means their product probably doesn't meet government standards.

It may surprise you to learn that there's no real enforcement behind a company labeling their product as gluten-free, because companies aren't required to have their ingredients or their end product tested. Companies are expected to comply with the government standard, but there's no need to prove compliance. It's essentially based on the honor system (since their reputation depends on the truth of their claims). The FDA (Food & Drug Administration) may test a product if they receive multiple complaints, but they don't test unless there's a need. As horrible as that sounds, it makes sense that one entity could never keep up with all the testing that would be required to check every gluten-free product on the market. Instead, if a company wants to have their product certified as being gluten-free, they have to go to a private, third-party company. The image that indicates a product is certified gluten-free belongs to the private company, and each company has their own image. That's why there's no set label for products that are certified gluten-free.

## Food Production and Food Labels

All of this shows why it's important to stick with foods that specify they're gluten-free, and when possible, products that have been certified as such. But just when you feel like you're starting to understand the system, I have a bit of a curveball for you. See, unfortunately, even foods labeled as gluten-free, certified or not, can still contain small amounts of the protein according to the Food & Drug Administration's standards (see note below). The FDA leaves room for this margin of error because a product completely and totally free of gluten contamination would be hard to achieve in the food industry, considering all the sources of ingredients and all the variables at play.

Most people that follow a gluten-free diet are safe to eat foods labeled as such, but in rare cases, your guest may be extremely sensitive to the effects of gluten and therefore very selective about which products they use. If so, you'll simply need to work more closely with them to understand what ingredients they can and can't use. I only mention this so you're aware of the possibility. You can still host them well; it will just require more planning.

Preparing gluten-free food doesn't have to be scary. This information is meant to give you the tools and foundation you need to make informed decisions at the store and in the kitchen. With all the products on the market, gluten-free cooking can be a breeze!

NOTE: The FDA allows a product to be labeled gluten-free as long as it contains less than 20 parts per million (ppm) of gluten. We don't have the time to fully walk through what that means, but here's a resource that may be helpful:

<https://nationalceliac.org/celiac-disease-questions/understanding-gluten-levels/>

### Ingredients and Cross Contact

Foods that don't contain flour of any kind may or may not be labeled as gluten-free. If they are, it's likely done from a marketing perspective; it doesn't mean other brands of that item aren't gluten-free. Of course, like we talked about before, there's always a risk of contamination. Don't let this paralyze you. If you have questions, your guest or the internet can provide answers. Things like milk, butter, eggs, meat, produce, etc. should be safe. Anything with more than one ingredient will need to be checked, though.

Something few people consider when wanting to cook or bake for someone with a limitation is the risk of cross contact, which should not be confused with cross contamination. \*Cross contact is where an allergen, *or in this case gluten*, is added to a *gluten-free* food or ingredient by accident during some step in prep, production, or service. If cross contact happens, the food is considered contaminated, but this isn't the same thing as cross contamination. Instead, cross contamination is a food safety term that refers to bacteria or other harmful substances being passed from one ingredient to another by accident. Cross contamination is an important issue, and should always be avoided, but our concern here is with cross contact. It's common for people, even those with dietary limitations, to incorrectly use cross contact and cross contamination interchangeably. I say this so you'll know what your guest means if they unintentionally use the wrong term.

## Ingredients and Cross Contact

Both cross contact and cross contamination can happen easily and usually happen when we aren't being mindful of what we're doing. Cross contamination is always a concern, since it can lead to food-borne illnesses, but that isn't our focus here. We all have our own routines and habits in the kitchen, and it's easy to go into autopilot when preparing food. However, when dealing with dietary limitations, autopilot is your enemy. Cross contact can happen in an instant and not be caught until it's too late if we're simply going through the motions.

A simple example is the butter or margarine you use at home. Let's say you have a butter dish or tub of margarine that you use to butter your morning toast. That butter or margarine is now contaminated with gluten. Another example is your toaster. Gluten-free bread shouldn't be toasted in the same toaster as regular bread. Once you get the hang of seeing the patterns, you'll notice where you need to intervene.

**\*Pro tip:** Take a look at the ingredients you need for your dish. Think through which items of yours have come into contact with *wheat or gluten*. Then simply buy new ones of those items or use previously untouched sources, rather than what's in the canisters or containers on your countertop or in your cupboards. Things like a new stick of butter or tub of margarine will be needed for your guest when you sit down to eat, so the items won't go to waste.

Using gluten-free ingredients in every step of food prep and service is crucial. Accidental slips can have real implications for your guest, especially for those with celiac disease or an allergy. And as we'll see in the next section, gluten is often found where you least expect it. Every ingredient and product must be checked for gluten, wheat, barley, rye, their hybrids, and any derivatives. Staying fully aware of what you're doing in the kitchen will help reduce the risk of using the wrong ingredient by mistake.

### **Surprising Sources of Gluten**

Okay, we've established that wheat, barley, rye, and their hybrids are off limits on a gluten-free diet. We've also covered that wheat-free products aren't necessarily gluten-free, which makes looking for the gluten-free and certified gluten-free labels important. But there's one last thing we need to talk about: gluten, wheat, barley, rye, and their hybrids can be hiding in some odd places and some not-so-obvious ways on ingredient lists.

Before we get to the lists below, I want to draw special attention to one of the seemingly odd places gluten can hide: baking powder. Many people wouldn't think to check basic ingredients like this one, but as you've learned so far, it's important to check all labels. No assumptions are safe when it comes to dietary limitations. All right, moving on.

Gluten is common in things like:

- Alcohols (such as beer), including some alcohol-based extracts for baking
- Anything malted (alcohol, drinks, vinegar, sweeteners)
- Baking powder (certain brands)
- Beer and many alcoholic beverages

## Surprising Sources of Gluten

- Bouillon cubes/powder
- Canned soups, especially cream-based ones
- Flavored rice mixes/meals
- Granola
- Gravy mixes
- Licorice and other candies
- Many french fries (wheat flour is often added for browning)
- Most cereals
- Some broths
- Some processed meats (hotdogs, deli meats, cold cuts, etc.)
- Some rice syrups
- Soy sauce

Here are some ingredients that do, or could, contain gluten without you knowing:<sup>17</sup>

- Dextrin and maltodextrin (can be from corn, wheat, potato, rice, or tapioca)
- Food starch/modified food starch (usually from corn or wheat)
- Hydrolyzed ingredients
- Some artificial colors and flavors
- Some yeast extracts (often from barley)

The bulleted lists above are NOT exhaustive. But I hope they show how tricky it can be to spot gluten-containing ingredients on a food label. My best advice is to stick to the items that are labeled gluten-free and ask your guest if a food appears safe for them. When in doubt, don't use a questionable ingredient.

### Utensils and Supplies

This is a big one that not many people consider when preparing gluten-free food in a kitchen that usually uses wheat flour: certain utensils are more likely to retain gluten residue and are therefore not a good choice when preparing gluten-free foods. Does this mean you have to buy new pots, pans, and utensils? No. It just means you'll need to take some extra precautions.

**Pro tip:** You can use foil or parchment paper to cover bakeware, like cookie sheets.

This will help put a barrier between the food and the baking surface.

Wooden spoons and cutting boards are two of the biggest culprits, since wood is both porous and easily scratched. These pores and scratches are the perfect places for microscopic proteins—and even bacteria—to hide. The same holds true for rubber spatulas. I don't know about you, but I use spatulas well beyond their prime, which really isn't advised. Once a rubber spatula has a cut, tear, or opening, gluten—and, again, bacteria—can hide in the crevices. Gluten can also hide in the space between the rubber of the spatula head and the plastic of the handle if the rubber can be removed, which most can.

## Utensils and Supplies

**\*Pro tip:** Instead of wooden spoons and worn spatulas, use stainless steel/metal whisks or forks to do your stirring. Stainless steel pots and pans or glass are your best options for cookware and bakeware, as non-stick items can also become scratched and harbor *gluten*. *To make sure your cookware and bakeware are clean, let them soak in very hot soapy water until the water cools, then give them a good wash (with a new sponge or brush!), focusing especially on any rims, rivets, corners, between prongs of forks, etc.* Unfortunately, even if you follow the cleaning recommendations, utensils with multiple parts or hard-to-clean places like ice cream/batter scoops, colanders, and strainers may not be safe to use if your guest has a severe *gluten intolerance*, since these items can be too hard to clean properly. This could present a problem if you need to drain noodles or strain something, but these utensils may be too hard to clean well enough *for someone with a severe sensitivity like celiac disease*. Using a lid to drain the food or scooping it out with a slotted spoon or tongs may be the best option, but do this once the water has cooled. (Be extra cautious while the water is hot!)

**Pro tip:** An easy solution when using cutting boards, especially wood or plastic ones, is to lay down a sheet of wax paper or parchment paper that's the size of your board, then wrap the cutting board with 2-3 layers of foil. These layers don't have to wrap around the entire board, but they should tuck under it and cover all surfaces. You'll need to be gentle while cutting, but this should keep your ingredients away from the cutting surface. When you're done, you can simply throw the layers away. Just be sure to use clean hands and avoid using wax paper, parchment paper, and foil boxes that you've handled with gluten-contaminated hands.

## Utensils and Supplies

Flour particles enter the air during cooking and baking. Those particles then settled on surfaces in the kitchen. That's why it's important to also use hot soapy water and a new sponge to wipe down all the surfaces you'll be working on—stovetop, countertops, island, table, etc. I recommend even cleaning surfaces you don't plan to use, since you may need to move items around if your countertops get crowded. Also, when dealing with a gluten intolerance, especially celiac disease, you'll want to prep all gluten-free foods before moving on to the rest of your menu. This will help prevent cross contact, because like I said, flour particles easily enter the air.

\*Also, something not many people think twice about—but can be a source of cross contact—is cooking *gluten-containing* foods and *gluten-free* foods on the same surface. This could be a grill, griddle, panini press, skillet, etc.—anything that may not get thoroughly cleaned between or after each use. You'll want to make sure the surface has been washed with soap and water. (Yes, this even includes the grill rack. Many people think turning the temperature up really high cleans the surface, but this is not an effective way to remove *gluten*. The only way to get rid of *gluten* is to remove it, since it isn't like bacteria that can be killed.) Then always cook the *gluten-free* food first and store it somewhere it can be kept warm while the rest of the food is prepared. It's so easy for foods to accidentally touch when cooking food at the same time, so it's best to cook a guest's specialty foods separately and before the rest of the food.

## Utensils and Supplies

\*But as important as carefully cleaned utensils and surfaces are for your *gluten-free* guest, they're only part of the process of hosting someone with a dietary limitation. On the day of your event, serving utensils can't be allowed to pass from *gluten-containing* dishes to *gluten-free* ones. I know this may seem like an impossible task, but there are ways to limit the risk of it happening. And it's so important that you have systems in place to do so, because once a dish is contaminated with *gluten*, your guest with the restriction can no longer safely eat it, which can be hard and stressful for both you and your guest. We'll talk about this in more detail in the Preparing to Serve the Food section in Part II.

**Pro tip:** If cleaning and preparing your own utensils (spatulas, metal utensils, pots and pans, cutting boards, etc.) feels too overwhelming, another option is to visit a nearby dollar store. You can get inexpensive items that can be dedicated to gluten-free food prep.

**\*Pro tip:** To further limit cross contact that could occur from using silverware and dishware that haven't been thoroughly cleaned, you can consider using disposable versions. Try searching for "elegant disposable dinnerware" or "upscale disposable silverware" to find elegant options if your event calls for a more fashionable touch. The disposable option does create more waste, but it also lowers the risk of your guest being exposed to the offending ingredient and makes cleanup a lot easier. As a word of caution, be sure the dishes you choose are meant for food, since some are meant for decoration only.

## Utensils and Supplies

After reading this section, you may be feeling discouraged, or you may be looking at your kitchen thinking, *There's no way I can do this*. But I have faith in you! Think of the joy and love you'll be sharing on the day of your event, instead of the fear or overwhelm you may be feeling right now. I know you can do this, as long as it's something you really want to do. That being said, if you decide it's too big of a task to make something gluten-free, that's okay too. Purchasing pre-made gluten-free foods is a great option and still shows your guest you care! If you choose to buy something rather than make it, Part II will still be helpful to you, so stay tuned! And as with everything else, make sure your guest can have the pre-made food item before you buy it.

Here are a few helpful links with more information on the basics of a gluten-free diet (the two links with asterisks were taken from the Celiac Disease section):

Celiac Disease Foundation\*

<https://celiac.org/>

Gluten Intolerance Group: Getting Started on a Gluten-Free Diet

<https://gluten.org/2019/10/14/getting-started-on-a-gluten-free-diet/>

National Celiac Association\*

<https://nationalceliac.org/about/>

## **Low Carb Diets—Atkins, Keto, Paleo, etc.**

To make sure we're on the same page, I want to share a little information about carbohydrates. Unfortunately, carbs are largely misunderstood in America. Carbs include any source of sugar or starch—baked goods, crackers, sweets, pasta, rice, potatoes, sweet potatoes, corn, etc. Even fiber is a starch; it's just one we can't digest very well. Many people follow low-carb diets for health-related reasons—whether it's a health condition like diabetes or because they just feel better doing so—but their motives may not be relevant to your event. If they have an underlying health condition, they'll likely let you know.

There are different forms of low-carb diets—Atkins, ketogenic (also known as keto), paleo, Whole30, etc. Primarily, these diets focus on getting calories from lean protein and healthy fats, rather than carbs. Each type of diet varies slightly, so you'll want to talk with your guest about the foods they work to avoid. Paleo, for example, focuses on foods that hunters and gatherers would have been able to find—meat, fish, vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds, etc., while keto allows for things that the paleo diet doesn't, such as some forms of dairy. To better understand your guest's limitations, ask them what foods they use in place of high-carb items.

## Low Carb Diets—Atkins, Keto, Paleo, etc.

Most American diets are high in carbs, so it can seem hard to think of meals that don't include bread, pasta, rice, or potatoes, but it's totally possible. You can find all sorts of recipes online, especially on Pinterest. Once you know your guest's specific dietary limitations, you can look for recipes. It could be as simple as grilled chicken or steaks with low-carb veggies. Or it could be hamburgers with the option of no bun. Your guest will be your best resource when it comes to menu planning around a low-carb diet.

Here are some helpful links with more info on low-carb diets:

Everyday Health: Overview

<https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/diet/low-carb-diet-beginners-guide-food-list-meal-plan-tips/>

Everyday Health: Popular Low-Carb Diets

<https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/diet/low-carb-diets-keto-low-carb-paleo-atkins-more/>



### Low FODMAP

At one point, my husband and I followed the low FODMAP diet to try to address some gut issues. If it came up in conversation, the other person usually gave me the slow blinks (maybe like you're doing now). "Low FODMAP" isn't the most user-friendly term, but it does describe the limitation, at least scientifically.

FODMAP stands for Fermentable Oligosaccharides, Disaccharides, Monosaccharides, and Polyols. And right now, you're probably experiencing even more slow blinks, so let me break it down a little further. Saccharides (as in oligosaccharides, disaccharides and monosaccharides) are sugars. The prefixes—oligo, di, and mono—describe how many pieces are in each sugar molecule. For example, mono—meaning one—means there's only one piece to that sugar. These are the most basic sugars. Glucose is a monosaccharide that's used on its own in the body for energy or in partnership with other pieces to create bigger sugars. Di—meaning two—means there are two pieces that make up that sugar. Lactose (found in dairy) and sucrose (which is regular white sugar) are examples of disaccharides, and glucose is a part of both of them. Oligosaccharides—oligo meaning few—describe sugars that are usually made up of 3–10 monosaccharides. Polyols are sugar alcohols (a whole different breed of sugars) that are found naturally in some fruits and vegetables but are also often used in sugar-free foods. Sorbitol and xylitol are common sugar alcohols used in low-calorie foods.

## Low FODMAP

The thing about these relatively small sugars is that they can be easily fermented by the bacteria that live in a person's gut. This is a bigger problem for some people than others, and when someone is especially sensitive to the effects of these simple sugars, they often resort to following the low FODMAP diet to avoid unpleasant symptoms (see the Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) section for more info).

A low FODMAP diet means eating foods that are low in the simple sugars described above. In some ways, the low FODMAP diet is one of the most restrictive. Some people are okay eating small quantities of higher FODMAP foods, while others have to strictly avoid them. As with everything, each person is unique in their tolerances. Monash University is seen as the go-to source for information on the low FODMAP diet. They've tested countless foods to determine their FODMAP levels.

Like I said, this diet is very limiting, and the guest following it likely feels very isolated. They'll know their trigger foods and can help you plan a meal that's safe, so definitely reach out to them.

Here's the link to the Monash University website:

<https://www.monashfodmap.com/>

### Vegetarian and Vegan

People are often confused by vegetarianism because it seems like vegetarians contradict themselves by eating only fruits and vegetables one day and then animal products the next. This confusion stems from a lack of knowledge. There are actually several types of vegetarian diets, each one allowing different things in moderation. Veganism is where someone consumes no animal products, but there's a spectrum, even in this, as you'll see. All forms of vegetarianism and veganism focus on eating fruits, vegetables, and plant-based proteins as the core diet, so the information below will only include the additional items the different types might eat.

#### Types of Vegetarian Diets

**Lacto-vegetarian:** *Lacto* means milk, so a lacto-vegetarian occasionally eats dairy products.

**Ovo-vegetarian:** *Ovo* means egg, so an ovo-vegetarian occasionally eats eggs.

**Lacto-ovo-vegetarian:** A lacto-ovo-vegetarian occasionally eats dairy and eggs.

**Pescatarian:** Pescatarians occasionally eat fish and seafood.

**Flexitarian:** Flexitarian is a newer term that describes someone who occasionally eats meat and/or animal products, but the core of their diet is still fruits, vegetables, and plant-based protein.

### **Vegan**

Vegans are often lumped in with vegetarians, but there is a difference. As I mentioned, there's a spectrum for veganism. For example, some vegans will eat honey, but others won't. Those who won't, often do so to limit the exploitation or harm of all animals, including bees. While honey production doesn't hurt bees, some commercial beekeeping practices can. As another example, some vegans will still use products made from animal products like shoes, lotions, and beauty products, but others won't. Those who won't, often do so for the same reason they may not consume honey—to limit the exploitation or harm of all animals.

Most vegetarians and vegans have deeply held convictions and choose to limit their diet to leave their corner of the world a better place. Even if you don't agree with their convictions, I hope you'll admire their determination to help animals and our world. It's important to realize, too, that some people follow vegetarian or vegan diets for health reasons. Someone with high cholesterol, for example, may need to cut back on animal products, in part or in full. Someone else may simply feel better when they avoid animal products. We can't know a person's motives until we ask. And when we ask, it should be from a place of trying to understand and connect.

## Vegetarian and Vegan

If someone coming to your event is vegetarian or vegan, ask them what that means for them, because as you can see, it might mean one thing to one person and something very different to another. Work with your guest to find recipes they can have, paying special attention to items like broths or seasonings that you may not remember have animal products in them.

Here are a couple of helpful links with more info on vegetarian and vegan diets and how to accommodate them:

Healthline: Vegetarian Diet Overview

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/vegetarian-diet-plan#foods-to-avoid>

Vegan.com: General Info

<https://vegan.com/info/>



### **Other Common Limitations**

It's possible that your guest has a sensitivity to things like artificial food coloring/dyes, MSG (monosodium glutamate), artificial sweeteners, etc. These sensitivities are less common than the things I've talked about so far, but they're still common enough to include.

These types of sensitivities can require some real sleuthing skills when it comes to reading food labels. MSG, for example, can go by many names on food labels or be a part of other ingredients. There are also many foods that have a form of naturally occurring MSG that some people may be sensitive to. Artificial food dyes can be in what seem like the most unlikely places, like white icing or vanilla ice cream, or items that are perceived as safe or healthy, including pickles, maple syrup, oatmeal packets, yogurt, salad dressings, vitamins/supplements, etc. The Food & Drug Administration requires these food colorants to be listed on product labels, so it's a good practice to check all the food items you'll be using in the kitchen if your guest is sensitive to artificial dyes. And as far as artificial sweeteners go, companies often add them to foods and medications to increase the sweetness while keeping the calorie count low. So while these products boast about having less sugar or being low calorie, they actually might contain artificial sweeteners to make up for the loss of flavor.

If you find out your guest has a sensitivity to an additive or sweetener, simply work with them to find brands or ingredients that are safe for them. These limitations can be easily accommodated, as long as you include your guest in the process.



**Part II: Practical Application**

## Preparing for Your Event

*Phew!* You made it through Part I! I know that was a lot to take in. You learned about the fears and struggles your guest may be experiencing, how to better understand and love your guest well, menu planning and cost cutting, some of the different reasons behind food limitations, and a few of the common dietary limitations.

My hope is that you already feel empowered and that you've gained helpful knowledge that gives you the confidence to host someone with a dietary limitation. But right now, even in your newfound confidence, you may still be feeling hesitant on the execution. That's okay! Part II is designed to be the boots-on-the-ground section where you can learn tips and tricks on how to host people with limitations well.

## Commonly Overlooked Essentials

Whether or not you choose to make something for your guest, you'll still need to purchase some new items and think through how you'll serve the food. We'll cover how to serve the food in subsequent sections. Here, I want to help you think through some commonly overlooked ingredients and foods that could sabotage all your hard work if you don't have a plan in place.

### **Butter/Margarine**

Butter may be an option for some guests, and if not, I want to emphasize that not all margarines are dairy-free. Some companies add milk derivatives like whey to create a more butter-like product. Also, remember that brushing butter or milk on the tops of things or adding them to crumbles, icings, gravies, etc. can be done without thinking, so be mindful of all stages of prep.

Also, if your guest has food allergies, you'll want to be aware of the fact that many margarines are made with soy and coconut. Whether coconuts are a tree nut or not is actually a bit of a controversy, but regardless of whether they are or aren't, some people with tree nut allergies can still have a reaction to them. Palm oil, though, which is taken from the tree, not the coconut, should be safe for those with a tree nut allergy, but be sure you're checking with your guest about ingredients.

Regardless of which option you use, it's important to realize that cross contact is a daily occurrence with butter and margarine; it just isn't a concern for most people, so they aren't aware of it. They don't have to think twice about using the utensil that just touched wheat bread or another off-limits ingredient in the butter/margarine. But that isn't the case for those with dietary limitations. Once the stick or container is contaminated, the whole thing can become unsafe for your guest to use.

**This means you'll need new sticks of butter or containers of margarine for all food prep and for the day of your event.** Scraping off the used portion of a stick or container of butter or margarine doesn't make it safe, so please buy new.

## Commonly Overlooked Essentials

**Pro tip:** Guests should not dip their own knives into the new butter/margarine you have for your guest with dietary limitations. Here are two options to overcome this risk of cross contact: 1) Place the new stick or container beside your guest with the dietary limitation. This will allow them to exclusively use it. This method can work just fine, but having multiple butters/margarines on the table can confuse guests, so you'll likely have to run interference to prevent others from using the wrong container. 2) Instead of having multiple sticks or tubs on the table, you can get some disposable mini cups with lids—the kind often used for condiments—and save out several portions for your guest with special dietary needs from the new stick or container. The other guests can then use whatever regular container of butter or margarine you place on the table. If you choose this method, I suggest saving out more portions than you think your guest will need, just to be safe.

### Condiments

Just like butter and margarine, other foods in jars or tubs—such as mayo, relish, mustard, jelly, honey, sugar, etc.—can become contaminated through regular use, and scraping off the top layer does not make the contents safe for someone with a dietary limitation. You'll want to use new containers during food prep and on the day of your event.

## Commonly Overlooked Essentials

Squeeze bottles can be an alternative to jars or tubs, but you'll want to be aware of the fact that they can still become contaminated if someone wipes the cap or spout with the same hand that touched their food. This may only be a concern for those with severe sensitivities or allergies, including those who have celiac disease, but it's still a concern. If your guest's sensitivity or allergy is severe, you may want to have separate and isolated condiments that are only for them. You can read more about this in the [Preparing to Serve the Food](#) section below.

Things such as dressings, dips, cheese, croutons, bread, nuts, granola, dried fruit, and other add-ins should be set apart from the main food to prevent cross contact. This also applies to things like chips, crackers, and pretzels (which we'll talk about more in the sections below). Put these things toward the end of the service line—not amongst the other foods—if using a buffet-style of service. Just be sure to have separate scoops, tongs, or spoons for every add-in, so people are less likely to contaminate foods by using the wrong utensil. This allows people to build their own salad or customize their food while also keeping your guest with the limitation as safe as possible.

### Questions to Ask Beforehand

Before planning your menu or buying the ingredients, it's important to reach out to your guest(s) with dietary limitations. Although the party is your show, your guest will feel more at ease if they've been included in the menu planning process or been able to tell you about certain ingredients that would be an issue for them. This isn't the time for secret recipes or ingredients. If that's a concern for you, you may want to plan to use a different recipe or swear the guest to secrecy, if need be. Talking to them ahead of time will save you so much time, money, and stress.

Let's explore the information you'll need from your guest and gentle ways of asking for it.

#### **Their Specific Dietary Limitation(s)**

Whether for health reasons or out of religious observation, people often have multiple dietary limitations. As challenging as this may seem for you as the host, try to remember that it's hard for them, too. You'll want to make sure you know which limitations you need to accommodate.

Ways to word the question(s): What foods or ingredients do you avoid? **OR** Do you have any limitations in addition to \_\_\_?

Ways NOT to word the question(s): What can't you have? What are you not eating now?  
Are you going to be able to eat anything at the party?

### **The Severity of Their Reaction**

No one wants to divulge that they experience digestive upset, but you will want to know if they could have an anaphylactic reaction. If they say no to your question about anaphylaxis, simply leave it at that. You'll know they shouldn't have a life-threatening reaction, and they won't feel obligated to embarrass themselves by going into detail. Bottom line is, you **DON'T** want to ask, "What kind of reaction do you have?" Please, please, don't ask anyone with a dietary limitation that question. It's so embarrassing for them! I can't tell you how many times I've been asked that question, and it's hard to answer in a way that doesn't make everyone feel uncomfortable.

Ways to word the question(s): Do I need to be aware of an anaphylactic reaction? **OR** Is there a risk of anaphylaxis that I need to know about?

Ways **NOT** to word the question(s): What kind of reaction do you have? Is your reaction life-threatening, or is it just a stomach issue?

### **If the Menu You Have Planned Works for Them**

It's possible that the recipes you thought you'd use at your event aren't safe for your guest. And, of course, you'll want to find that out before you buy all the ingredients, but you won't know until you ask.

Ways to word the question(s): Would \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_ be safe for you to eat? **AND** Would you like to see the recipes I plan to use to see if they're safe for you?

## Questions to Ask Beforehand

### Pretend Conversation

Here's how those questions might play out in a conversation, whether through text, over the phone, or in person (Y = you, G = guest):

Y: Hi, [insert name]! I'm starting the planning process for [insert event], so I was hoping we could chat about the food.

G: Sure, that'd be great.

Y: Awesome! First off, I want to make sure I'm aware of your limitations and their severity. What foods or ingredients do you avoid? And do I need to be aware of an anaphylactic reaction?

G: I'm gluten-free. And, no, I don't have an anaphylactic reaction.

Y: Thanks for that info. For the meal, I was planning on making \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_. Do you want to see the recipes for any of these to make sure they're safe for you?

G: I'm not sure about the \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_. Can I see the ingredients for those?

Y: Definitely. [Send them links or pictures.] Let me know if I need to swap out any ingredients.

G: I'll just need to make sure the \_\_\_\_ that you plan to use is safe. Everything else looks good. Can you send me a picture of the box/bottle/container?

Y: Yep. Here's the brand I normally use. [Send them the link or pictures.] Is it okay?

## Questions to Ask Beforehand

G: Unfortunately, no. I'm really sorry. I can just bring my own food if that'd be easier.

Y: There's no need to be sorry! I want us to figure this out together. Can you send me the link or some pictures of a brand that's safe for you and where I can find it?

G: Sure. Here you go. [Sends you pictures and info.] I really appreciate you doing this for me!!

Y: Of course! Is there anything else you'd like me to know or do with the meal so it's safe for you? I already plan to \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_ (use a new butter, cover the baking dish in parchment paper/foil, have new jars of condiments, or whatever it is you plan to do). Is there anything else I need to do?

G: I think we're good since the recipes you chose are already mostly gluten-free.

Y: Okay, let me know if you think of anything else.

G: Will do. Thanks again!

Y: I'm happy to do it.

And so on . . .

It's not that you're trying to handle your guest with kid gloves or treat them like a porcelain doll. The goal is to help them feel accepted, included, and welcome. Language that pries, or that comes off as harsh, embarrasses them or makes them feel like an inconvenience. Clearly, as the host, that's the opposite of what you want them to feel. That's why framing things well is important.

## Questions to Ask Beforehand

**Pro tip:** This one is important! I highly recommend taking pictures of the front and back of all wrappers/packaging of the ingredients you use in preparing the meal. This way, if your guest has questions, you can show them the packaging. Your guest will love you as a host if you take this extra step. Keep the pictures for 48–72 hours in case your guest has a negative reaction. You can then work with them to understand what may have caused the reaction. Check out the Follow Up with Your Guest section below for more info on reaching out after your event.

### Bringing Their Own Food

If you approach your guest about the menu for your event (like in the pretend conversation above) and they start off by saying they'll just bring their own food, I encourage you to gently dig a little deeper. You'll want to better understand if they're offering to bring food to keep from being a burden, if they're concerned about being exposed, if they simply find it easier, if they have a severe sensitivity, etc. If they continue to insist on bringing their own food, let that be okay. Shift to supporting them and helping with food service, rather than food prep.

Ways to word the question(s): Is there a way I can help you feel safe eating the food at the event? **OR** Will you need to bring your own food for health reasons?

Ways NOT to word the question(s): Do you not trust me? What will the other guests think? I'm working hard on this event, so isn't there a way you can eat the food I'll be making?

### **Alternate Pretend Conversations**

Here's how these questions might play out in an alternate pretend conversation (Y = you, G = guest):

Y: Hi, [insert name]! I'm starting the planning process for [insert event], so I was hoping we could chat about the food.

G: I appreciate you reaching out, but I can just bring my own food.

Y: I can understand if you need to do that, but I'd like to find a way to make the food safe for you if we can. Would you be open to working with me to find safe recipes? Or would you feel more comfortable bringing your own food?

### **Option One**

G: If we work together, we might be able to make it work. As long as you're sure it isn't too much trouble.

Y: Of course it isn't too much trouble! First off, I want to make sure I'm aware of your limitations and their severity. What foods or ingredients do you avoid? And do I need to be aware of an anaphylactic reaction?

[At this point, this conversation picks up with the original pretend conversation above.]

### Option Two

G: Thanks for being willing to do that, but I'd feel more comfortable bringing my own food. I hope that's okay.

Y: Of course that's okay! I want you to feel safe when it comes to the food. How can I help on the day of the event? Will you need dedicated space in the kitchen, special serving utensils, or something else?

G: A really clean space would be helpful. I'll bring my own serving utensils, though.

Y: Sounds good. What will I need to do to make the space clean enough?

And so on . . .

If the conversation turns out more like option two, don't be discouraged. Over time, your guest will either grow more comfortable with you and be open to the idea of having you prepare something for them, or you'll get really good at supporting them. Either way, you're building trust and relationship. You can find a few more thoughts on how to come alongside guests who are bringing their own food in the *When They Insist on Bringing Their Own Food* section below.

### Leave Enough Time for Prep

In case you need to reach out to your guest with a question, I suggest giving yourself additional time to prep for your event. You may get part way through a recipe and realize you need some guidance. The internet might be able to help with some of your questions, but your guest is your best resource.

Besides possibly needing to get answers to questions you didn't anticipate, you'll be trying new things, whether big or small. In my experience, even after all my years of altering recipes, things turn out much better if I give myself more than enough time. When I don't, I usually get frustrated, frazzled, and stressed. Maybe you can relate. Regardless, I don't want that for you as you prepare for your special event. I want you to look back with a smile, not regret that stems from feeling rushed.



### **When They Insist on Bringing Their Own Food**

If your guest insists on bringing their own food after you've offered to prepare something for them, simply let them bring their own food. Their allergy or sensitivity may be severe or their anxiety surrounding unfamiliar foods may be high. No matter their reasoning, it's okay.

In these cases, the best thing to do is offer to help them with serving the food. Do they need disposable plates and silverware because of a severe allergy? No problem. Do they need a clean space in the kitchen and/or refrigerator? Ask them what that needs to look like and then do it. Do they need you to be clear with the other guests about something? Step in and be the voice they may not feel comfortable being.

There are tons of ways to host someone with a dietary limitation that go beyond preparing the food. And when other guests inevitably ask why they're eating something different, you can support your guest with special dietary needs by steering the conversation away from their limitation once they've politely answered a few questions (revisit the Feeling Seen without Feeling Stared At section for more on this). These simple gestures will go a long way to helping your guest with dietary restrictions feel welcome and loved.

### **Help! Last Minute Guest!**

You've just learned that an unexpected—and potentially unknown—guest is now coming to your gathering, and all you really know about them is that they have a dietary limitation. You're too far into the process to plan a new menu, and you certainly don't feel comfortable reaching out to a stranger for more information.

**First thing to do:** don't panic.

**Second thing to do:** reach out anyway, even if it's just to the person who invited this new guest. Ask if you need to whip something up for this guest, if they plan to bring their own food, or if they'll be eating before they come. It's important to ask in a way that helps this guest feel welcome. What I mean is, don't ask in a way that makes it seem like you're hoping they bring their own food or eat before they come. If you need to prepare food for them, you'll also need to know their dietary limitation(s) and the severity. Revisit the Questions to Ask Beforehand section for more guidance on reaching out.

**Third thing to do (once you have more info):** if you need to provide food for this guest, look over your menu for what contains the offending ingredient. Is anything on your menu safe for them to eat? If so, great! If not, skip to step four. Note: If you don't need to prepare food for them, you can simply move into a supporting role by having clean utensils and/or prep area and by steering the conversation away from their limitation. Revisit the Feeling Seen without Feeling Stared At section for more on this.

## Help! Last Minute Guest!

**Fourth thing to do:** if your menu can't be tweaked to accommodate this guest, offer some things you can make with what you have on hand. Look through your kitchen and take note of some staples (rice, pasta, fresh produce, canned veggies, proteins like meat or beans, etc.) that don't include the ingredient in question. For example, you could grill or bake a chicken breast and fresh veggies (or heat canned ones) with salt and pepper or other safe spices. If you're stumped on what to make, try using a website that gathers recipes based on what you have in your kitchen. Several websites will pull up if you search for things like “recipe generator from ingredients” or “recipes from ingredients I have”.

Given the short notice, this guest may not expect to be able to eat much at your event, so your willingness to provide them with something safe to eat will mean more than you know. As far as serving the food goes, you may simply keep their food separate and have them dish it up for themselves when the time comes or have the plate ready for them.

The methods in the next few sections—specifically the Preparing to Serve the Food and The Day of Your Event sections—will still be helpful for you, even if they need to be modified. I also highly recommend reading Part I: Understanding: Your Guest (along with its subsections) to better help you see the person instead of the problem.

Work with the guest to make the event a pleasant experience, and don't feel obligated to apologize. They know you weren't expecting them. Apologizing repeatedly will only make them feel like a burden. Take comfort in knowing that even though you weren't expecting this, you can still host and serve this guest well. Last-minute changes don't have to derail you or your event. You've got this!

### Preparing to Serve the Food

How you serve the food is just as important as how you prepared it. If cross contact happens while people are serving themselves, all your hard work will be for nothing, and it's possible your guest won't be able to eat the food. Remember, it's not okay to tell your guest to pick off the offending ingredient or to eat around the contaminant. Your guest may choose to do these things so they have something to eat or to avoid being an inconvenience, but they certainly don't want to do it. And if they have to do those things—or worse yet not eat anything but sides or snack foods—they'll be more hesitant to accept an invitation in the future.

**Pro tip:** Keep out small portions of the safe foods your guest can have and store them in the refrigerator or somewhere safe. This way, if something happens and the food is contaminated, your guest with the limitation will still have food they can eat. Foods you may want to consider keeping in reserve are some snack options like chips, pretzels, cheese, etc. that haven't touched other things; fresh fruit and veggies; desserts; and, of course, main dishes and sides. But even if you only keep out portions of the main meal, you'll be doing your guest a huge favor. If these portions aren't needed, they can be added to the rest of the food for others to enjoy or sent home with your guest.

## Preparing to Serve the Food

Your guest understands that accidents happen. It's how you handle the accident and help them through it that matters. Keeping a portion of the specialty food in reserve or being willing to work with them to whip up something else are great options that enable you to handle a mix up with confidence and ease.

But even with these tips, you may be wondering, *How am I supposed to make the food look normal, keep others from contaminating or eating it all, and not draw attention to the guest?* Those are great questions! In this section, I provide four systems for serving the food, but the last option, a hybrid, is what I recommend you use if your event allows for it. But before you jump to the hybrid's section, I want to encourage you to read the other three options first. Doing so will help you fully understand the hybrid system.

### Option 1: Labels

One way to differentiate the specialty food is with labels or tags. I've seen this done at some formal events, but they always make a gigantic mistake when doing it: they place the label or tag on the table beside the food item, whether as a folded piece of cardstock, a piece of paper in a placeholder stand, or a little sign. While this may look elegant and functional, the label can be easily bumped, moved, or knocked over. The guest with a dietary limitation could then be confused or select the wrong food—both of which are a huge problem. As a workaround, I've seen some caterers use magnetic labels on the fronts of the metal chafing dishes, which may not be as easily moved or bumped but are difficult to see. And putting the label on the lid isn't an option, since lids can easily be switched. Instead, you'll want your label to be attached to the dish and stand above it.

**Pro tip:** You can easily make signs that attach to and stand above your dish. You'll have to get a little crafty with this one, but it doesn't take much effort. Any hinged clip can work—chip clips, binder clips, beach towel clips, bulldog clips, etc. You can likely use what you already have at home, but feel free to buy pretty ones if you want your event to feel more elegant. However, be aware that soft/covered tips can help prevent scratches. Once you have your clips, you'll simply write out or print out tags that say “Gluten-free,” “Dairy-free,” “Vegan,” or whatever you need them to say. The label can say multiple things if need be. Then use hot glue, tape, or removable glue dots to attach the paper to the clip. Only use skewers or toothpicks in things that are individually portioned like muffins, cupcakes, finger foods, etc. See the Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks section for more info on this option.

### Option 2: Colors

Another way to differentiate the specialty foods is to use a color system. In this method, you would establish a color for each type of dish. That color would be placed on the dish **and** on the dish's serving utensil. Here's what I mean: Say you have a guest who's gluten-free. You've made or purchased items for them, or maybe they've brought their own. Let's say you assign gluten-free the color yellow (so it stands out). You would then place yellow on the dish and on the serving utensil. When guests are serving themselves, either at the table or buffet style, you'll explain that yellow utensils are only for yellow dishes. Make it clear that yellow utensils don't go into non-yellow dishes and vice versa. Color with color, no exceptions.

You can achieve this color system with things you have at home. You can use the little stickers many people have lying around from past garage sales, construction paper, ribbon, etc. Whatever you use to indicate the color and whatever you use to make them stick (tape, hot glue, removable glue dots, etc.), make sure it won't harm your dishes or utensils.

**Pro tip:** Red is an eye-catching color, but it also has a lot of underlying meanings, one of which is that something is wrong. I suggest using other vibrant colors instead, like pink, lime green, bright blue, etc.

## Option 2: Colors

A variant of this method is to use pairs of stickers. Put one matching sticker on the dish and the other on the utensil (securing them with tape, hot glue, removable glue dots, etc.). This can be especially helpful when young kids are around, since the concept of colors with colors may be a little tricky for some.

**Pro tip:** If your guest needs new utensils due to a severe allergy or sensitivity, or if you just want a classier feel, you can always get colored serving utensils at dollar stores, retail stores, and online. From there, you would simply need a way to mark the dishes with the color you've selected. You can even purchase colored serving dishes that match the utensils you've bought if that better suits your event.

An important part of this method is to put signs up at the beginning, middle, and end of the service line if you're using a buffet style of service. People will inevitably come late, have been in the bathroom, be outside wrangling kids, etc. while you give instructions. These signs will keep you from having to repeat yourself over and over or risk someone not following the system. This can be as simple as a sign that says, "To protect all guests, please only use yellow utensils in yellow dishes. Color with color." Or if you're using the sticker method, your sign could say, "To protect all guests, please match the animal on the utensil with the animal on the dish. Animal with animal." This would apply for any colors or types of stickers you use.

### Option 3: Segregating the Food

Segregating the specialty food away from the rest of the food can keep it safer, but this doesn't allow the specialty food to feel normal, which, in turn, keeps your guest from feeling fully included. To the person with the dietary limitation, it can feel a bit like they're being shunned or stared at while they get their food. Because of this, I don't usually recommend this method, but there are times when it's the best choice.

If you feel this system does work best for your event, make sure it's clear that the food is set apart for a reason. Again, you don't want to put someone's name on the food, but you can put signs up that say, "Vegan Options," "Dairy-free Options," or whatever the limitation is. This may be the best way to go if you're planning a large event or a kids' party.

**Pro tip:** Although I don't recommend segregating all specialty foods unless it's necessary, I do recommend separating condiments and add-ins. You can use a nice basket or platter with a sign that says, "For Gluten-Free Use Only," or "Vegan Options Only," or "For Dairy-Free Use Only". This should, ideally, let other guests know these items are off limits, but you may need to specify this when you address the group before food service starts.

### **Option 4: Hybrid**

As I said, the best option, in my opinion, is a hybrid of the three I've explained. By using labels, a color system (including signs explaining the system), and a separate basket or tray for condiments and add-ins, you'll substantially reduce the risk of cross contact. There's no way to fully remove the risk unless you plan a menu that's completely free of the ingredient, buy all new ingredients, buy new cookware/bakeware and utensils, buy new appliances, buy a new house . . . kidding. But you see what I mean. Your goal is to reduce the risk of cross contact by having systems in place and a contingency plan in case the food becomes contaminated.

A hybrid system will help you approach your event from multiple angles, feel as prepared as possible, and give your guest peace of mind. With just a little bit of planning, a hybrid system can provide you with a seamless way to serve the needs of all your guests. You can also tailor it in countless ways to suit whatever event you may be hosting, whether now or in the future.

### **Note about Large Events**

Many of the things I've talked about in this guide are still helpful if you're planning a large-scale event like a wedding, graduation party, family reunion, coming of age party, neighborhood block party, etc. Clearly, you wouldn't be able to talk to each and every guest about their potential dietary limitations, but you could still plan a menu to accommodate the most common dietary restrictions and have a system in place for serving the food. Even if you only plan a menu—or pieces of the menu—to accommodate those who are gluten-free, dairy-free, and vegetarian, you'll be including more people than you realize.

If you're working with a caterer, ask them to have the ingredient information available at the event. Depending on the caterer, they may have no problem with this, or they may give some push back. After all, their livelihood depends on their recipes. Work with them to get information on at least the major nine allergens (eggs, fish, milk, peanuts, sesame, shellfish, soy, tree nuts, and wheat).

If your event involves multiple people bringing dishes, ask them to provide you with the recipes or the list of ingredients. This isn't as helpful as having the labels and packages available, but it'll help a guest better determine if something is safe for them to eat. Then place signs near the food tables to indicate that limited dietary information is available upon request or label dishes that you know are free of certain ingredients (as long as you're sure they're actually free of the ingredient).

Regardless of whether you use a caterer or have a potluck event, the hybrid way of serving food can still be applied, even if it needs to be slightly modified to match the level of the event. Clearly, animal stickers on the utensils and dishes won't work at a wedding, but there's bound to be something that matches the event's aesthetic. Instead, though, you may choose to simply segregate the food at your large event to allow the guests with limitations the chance to get the food they need before others "sample" it all. You'll know which option suits your event best.

### **Note about Kids' Parties**

If your event involves mostly kiddos, especially young ones, segregating the food may be a necessity. Because kids can be unfamiliar with dietary limitations, they don't think twice about certain actions that could result in cross contact. And, unfortunately, they also don't usually think twice about making comments.

In these situations, I suggest talking to the parents of the child with the dietary limitation. Ask them how you can best include their child while keeping them safe. Maybe they'll prefer that you segregate the food. Maybe they'll ask you to dish up their child's food away from the others to avoid drawing attention. Maybe they'll ask you to do something else entirely. But asking both the parent and the child what they would like to see happen will help them all feel more at ease and included. This, of course, is after you've already worked with the parents on safe food options for their kiddo, whether it's something you're providing or something the child brings with them.

### **Note about Severe Restrictions**

Some people with dietary limitations have to be extremely cautious due to a severe sensitivity, intolerance, allergy, or health condition. It's possible that someone with a gluten intolerance or wheat allergy may not even be able to touch the packaging of something that contains gluten or wheat. Their sensitivity may even involve using gluten-free topical products like shampoo, lotion, and makeup. Some sensitivities may even require your guest to use specialty dish soap and all of their own equipment. As a result, these guests may not be able to safely eat anything they don't bring for themselves. That's okay. As I've said before, you can still love on them well by asking how you can support them.

Most of all, I want to encourage you to not shy away from inviting guests with severe restrictions. As much anxiety as you feel about hosting them, they likely feel the same way about attending, but that doesn't mean you don't extend the invite. Like we talked about in Part I, people with dietary limitations want to feel normal. They want to be included. They want to spend time with friends and family and make new acquaintances. It just has to look a little different for them. So while hosting them may take more planning or some seemingly unorthodox methods, it'll be so worth it, because being trusted by someone with a dietary limitation is such a privilege. This is especially true for those who have severe sensitivities. They're trusting you with their health, which is no small thing. Meeting them in that is a beautiful gift for both of you.

### **Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks**

Each holiday looks a little different for every family, region, culture, denomination, etc. As mentioned in the Cost and Menu Planning section, no matter your menu or the holiday or event, it's important for your guest with a dietary limitation to ideally have a protein, two or three sides, and a bread alternative if your meal calls for something like buns, rolls, or crackers. This will allow for a well-rounded meal, where the person with the dietary limitation feels fully included. And to save yourself a lot of time and headache, try to plan as many options as possible that everyone can partake in. This could mean things that are naturally free of the ingredient in question, or it could mean modifying most of the menu options to be safe for everyone (keeping you from having multiples of everything and having a higher risk of cross contact).

But what about the things at events that aren't as obvious? So much goes into planning an event that aspects of the food may go unintentionally overlooked. One of the biggest examples is desserts and sweet treats. This is a huge part of most holidays and events, and it can be a source of sadness for some people with dietary limitations, especially kids. The pain of feeling left out can be amplified when the treats are a central part of the event.

Finger foods are another potential area of concern since cross contact is almost inevitable. These types of foods are common at parties, BBQs, Christmas parties, and even formal events as appetizers.

## Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks

**Pro tip:** One way to overcome part of the risk of cross contact with finger foods is to clearly label the items that were made to accommodate a dietary limitation. The best way to do this for finger foods is to use toothpick signs that can be written on and stuck in the food. These little flags can be found using internet searches like “toothpick food signs for party buffet” or “white flag cupcake toppers”. As cute as themed flags are, your guests may not understand that something like American flags represent an accommodation, even if you put up signs, so it’s best to go with a plain option and write on them. You can even make these signs yourself if you’re up for it (just be sure you make them in a clean environment since they’ll be in people’s food).

Another type of food that you’ll want to think through is snacks. It’s common to serve things like pretzels, crackers, cheeses, and fresh fruit and veggies with ranch dressing, yogurt or cream cheese dips, cheese balls, fondue, etc. There’s nothing wrong with these options, but I suggest keeping several servings of the dips and the dippers in reserve for those with dietary limitations. And you may not know, but there are quite a few snack options at the store that can accommodate different dietary needs (gluten-free pretzels, dairy-free bread, nut-free crackers, etc.). Ask your guest what brands they can have; they may even offer to bring their own.

Desserts, finger foods, and snacks may be the most commonly overlooked food items, but they aren’t the only ones. So let’s discuss aspects of specific events that you, as the host, may not have thought to consider.

### **Easter**

Easter looks a little different for various denominations and for every family. For some, the meat is lamb or ham. For others, it's pork loin or fish. The sides can range from potatoes au gratin, to asparagus, to carrots, to salad. And don't forget the rolls and desserts! With some minor tweaks, many of your main dishes and sides can be made to accommodate just about any dietary limitation.

The protein is often the easiest to alter, so your bigger concern will be the sides. Steamed, baked, or grilled asparagus can be seasoned with olive oil and spices to create a neutral dish (be sure to check your spices for the ingredient that your guest needs to avoid). Baked potatoes with add-on option like butter, sour cream, cheese, dairy-free margarine, dairy-free cheese, chives, bacon bits, etc. can be an easy way for people to accommodate different tastes and limitations. You get the idea.

Grilling can be a great option to minimize ingredients while maximizing flavor, but it does come with risks. See the pro tip in the Fourth of July/BBQs/Picnic section below for important tips on keeping your guest safe when it comes to the grill.

### **Fourth of July/BBQs/Picnics**

BBQs and picnics are equal parts hard and easy. They're easy because the protein(s) may already be safe for your guest or can be adapted to meet your guest's needs, and specialty side dishes can be super simple to find and make. But they're hard because they often mean people bringing food to share, people coming and going throughout the event, and lots of kids, all of which can result in cross contact, especially without your knowledge. The tips provided in the hybrid option of the Preparing to Serve the Food section above will be especially helpful for this kind of event.

Keeping condiments, add-ins, toppings, sauces, etc. away from the main food will help reduce the risk of cross contact in some ways, but there are still plenty of ways it can happen. Once you know your guest's limitations, you can work to protect them.

## Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks

**Pro tip:** Grilled foods are a staple when it comes to BBQs and picnics. Cooking on the grill can be a great way to avoid using an ingredient your guest can't have (since grilled foods often require fewer ingredients). However, you'll want to make sure your grill is properly cleaned. Scraping the surface and turning the heat up really high isn't an appropriate way to clean the surface if you have a guest with a dietary restriction. Instead, clean the grate with hot water and soap. Also, after the grill has been cleaned, it's best to grill the food for your guest with the dietary limitation first. Grilling everything at once and simply trying to designate a side of the grill for the specialty foods will exponentially increase the risk of cross contact. Food can touch the wrong side of the grill, food can touch food, and, of course, you would need **different utensils** for the specialty foods. Save yourself the headache and cook the specialty foods first while the grill and utensils are uncontaminated. The food can then be reheated or kept warm in the oven using a very low temperature. If you use the oven, I suggest setting a timer or reminder.

BBQs and picnics are notorious for cross contact. I've seen spoons being moved from dish to dish, the same tongs being used on everything, people reaching their hands into chip bags (after touching foods I can't have), and unknown foods mixed in with other dishes from people spilling or using the wrong utensil. These events can be a nightmare for people with dietary restrictions, despite many people thinking it's an easier option for those with limitations. It's important that you do everything in your power to protect the guest with special dietary needs.

## Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks

In addition to the ideas in the Preparing to Serve the Food section, which are super helpful for BBQs and picnics, here are some additional tips and things to consider:

- Use individual chip bags if possible. They prevent cross contact and allow people to read the ingredients for themselves. If that isn't an option, find a way to separate chips from larger bags into personal portions or provide tongs for each type and container of chip/snack to prevent cross contact from the wrong utensils or people's hands.
- Keep specialty finger foods on a separate tray, platter, or plate than the regular finger foods and label them well.
- Keep dips out of the center of chips, veggie trays, and fruit trays. Always put the dips on the side or in individual containers.
- If you'll be presenting food in a fun way (like chips surrounding a football-shaped cheese ball or fresh fruit surrounding an American flag cake), be sure to keep uncontaminated food in reserve. Then let your guests know you have extra.
- Check the ingredients of all spices, sauces, marinades, and rubs well. Don't assume they're safe for your guest.



### Halloween

Halloween and harvest festivals can be hard because people like to be creative with the design or look of their dishes—popcorn balls that look like eyeballs, things dipped in candy coatings or chocolate, Rice Krispie treat pumpkins, flavored popcorn, etc. Often, some unexpected ingredient is used to add texture or realism, but it's masked by other components of the food. Someone with a dietary limitation doesn't know where to turn at these events because there's no way of knowing what's hiding inside each treat. Even when store-bought candy is used, most of it contains chocolate and nuts, which aren't an option for many people.

The same suggestions for finger foods apply here, maybe even more so. If your spooky item was made to accommodate a limitation, let people know by labeling the dish or putting flags in the individual portions.

Choose recipes, creations, or store-bought candy that can accommodate a wide range of limitations. But when choosing candy, try to select the good stuff. I won't name names, but we all know there's candy that's dairy- and nut-free that no one really wants to eat.

### Thanksgiving

For the most part, Thanksgiving menus don't vary a whole lot. But even though this is true, everyone puts their own twist on the dishes. It can leave a guest unsure of what is and isn't safe, even when the normal foods are present. If you're having a guest with a limitation for Thanksgiving, make sure they can have the turkey (or you have a substitute if they're vegetarian or vegan), gravy, potatoes, another side, a bread option, and at least one dessert.

This isn't as hard as it may seem. Ask your guest if the turkey you've selected is safe for them (many brands use additives). When you have a turkey that will work, use the liquid at the **end of the cooking process** to make the gravy for your guest with dietary limitations. This will add flavor to their gravy without the use of broths or bouillon that may not be safe for them. In case you're wondering, store-bought gravy or gravy packets aren't usually an option for people with dietary limitations.

**Pro tip:** Gluten-free flours, milk alternatives, and margarine can all change the consistency and flavor profile of gravy. A great workaround to making gravy for your guest with limitations is to ask them what ingredients they would need to make it themselves and then have those items on hand. The guest can then make the gravy once they arrive, as long as you have clean cookware and utensils (see the Utensils and Supplies subsections of the Common Dietary Limitations section above). Just make sure you save out at least two cups of the liquid from the fully cooked turkey.

## Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks

Mashed potatoes may seem like a hard thing to alter, but they're actually one of the easiest. Boil the potatoes in plain water or a safe broth and then save out a good-sized amount for your guest with the limitation. By *good-sized amount*, I mean enough for the day of the event and for a portion or two of leftovers if you'll be sending food home with your guests. (Because who doesn't want Thanksgiving leftovers??) You can fix the smaller portion in a way that accommodates your guest's dietary needs. Then fix the larger portion the way you normally would. You're welcome to fix all the potatoes to accommodate your guest, but this is a good workaround if you don't feel comfortable altering the whole dish.

**Pro tip:** Margarine and a milk substitute like almond milk are easy swaps when it comes to making mashed potatoes. The flavors blend well and taste great!

Stuffing takes a little more thought to ensure that all the ingredients are safe. Boxed stuffing is likely not an option unless you find one that is specific to your guest's dietary limitation (gluten-free, vegan, etc.). Homemade stuffing is surprisingly easy to make, but you'll need to check all the ingredients—bread or cornbread, broth, spices, butter/margarine, etc.—which can take some time.

Specialty rolls, biscuits, and buns can usually be purchased. There are also plenty of recipes online (always test them ahead of time, though!). The same is true for pies and desserts. However, homemade pies just hit differently, don't they? No pressure intended; it's just the truth. If you do choose to make a pie for your guest with dietary limitations, the first step is to get their approval on the recipe and ingredients. Not much would be worse than to find out your guest can't eat the thing you spent so much time preparing.

## Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks

The hardest part about baking pies for those with dietary limitations is the crust. The filling can be adjusted rather easily, but the crust will make or break whether the pie is edible or not. Over the years, I've tried close to a dozen different pie crust recipes. Some were total disasters, others were so-so. The biggest lesson I've learned is that gluten-free pie crusts behave differently and can be difficult to work with. Because they can be drier, wetter, crumblier, etc., they probably won't roll out the way you're used to, which may require you to pat the dough into the pie dish. Don't be discouraged if that's where you find yourself when it comes time to bake. It doesn't mean you did anything wrong or that the crust won't be tasty.

**Pro tip:** Test out the pie crust in advance. You don't need to make an entire pie (unless you're concerned about the filling). But make the crust, roll it out (or attempt to), and bake it, to learn how it behaves and tastes. This will save you so much anxiety and frustration when you go to make the actual pie. This even applies if you bought a pie crust mix. Roll or pat out a small plain crust and bake it on a cookie sheet until done (usually golden brown). Any remaining crust can be used to make something like cinnamon pie crust, which was a favorite treat of mine to make with my grandma. It's so yummy! To make it, roll/pat out the rest of the crust, add a layer of butter or margarine, coat with sugar, sprinkle cinnamon on top, and bake at whatever temp your crust recipe calls for until the edges are golden brown. You get to test out your crust and get a delicious treat in the process. That's a win-win!

### Christmas

Many of the things that apply for Thanksgiving also apply to Christmas. The proteins eaten at Christmas can usually be altered to accommodate all guests, which leaves the side dishes and desserts. Check out the Thanksgiving section above for information on gravy, mashed potatoes, stuffing, breads, and pies.

Growing up, my family spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with my mom's parents. The food on Christmas Eve was always finger foods, sandwiches, and snacks because we got together before or after the Christmas Eve service at church. Christmas Day, however, was the big day with all the trimmings. I say this so you can be thinking through where things like snacks, finger foods, and treats may be present at your holiday parties without you being fully aware.

We all know that while everyone looks forward to the food at Christmas, they're really saving room for the treats. People bake for what seems like weeks leading up to Christmas, whether it's for their own gathering or as a way to love on friends and neighbors.

Those traditions don't have to stop when someone develops a dietary limitation or someone new with a limitation enters your circle. In fact, I encourage you to find ways to keep the traditions alive and learn how to alter the recipes. My grandma did this for me, and it was one of the most special gifts she ever gave me.

## Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks

There are countless dessert, candy, and sweet treat recipes online for any limitation you can imagine. I'm not saying they're all good. It's a frustrating truth that cooking and baking for dietary limitations can require trial and error. But your guest with a special dietary need will be so appreciative that you took the time to think of them, whether that means getting their approval on a new recipe or finding something special for them at the store.

**Pro tip:** When looking for new recipes, stick with ones that have high ratings. Or, as mentioned in another pro tip, type “best” in front of the type of recipe you're looking for. If a recipe has more than two ingredients you haven't worked with before, I suggest finding another. This may sound limiting, but too many unfamiliar ingredients create more places where the recipe can go wrong.

Baking actually involves a lot of science; in fact, there's a whole field of study surrounding it! Each ingredient in a recipe plays a role in the outcome of the final product, which means altering recipes can be trickier than simply substituting one ingredient for another. But don't let that intimidate you! What I don't cover here can easily be found online.

Dairy-free margarine can be used in place of butter in most baking recipes. However, most margarines contain salt, so consider decreasing the amount of salt added elsewhere. An important thing to note is that margarine may not work well in flaky products like pastries or some pie crusts. In these cases, look for recipes that use vegan butter (dairy-free margarine), since they'll compensate for the lack of butter. Also, as you'll see in the next section, oil can often take the place of melted butter in a recipe.

## Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks

Gluten in wheat flour acts as a binder, adds structure, and allows the product to rise. That means that gluten-free baked goods will need additional ingredients to compensate, especially if the product is expected to rise well. Baking soda, baking powder, and an acid (like vinegar or cream of tartar) are often used in combination for this very reason.

Because altering a recipe to be gluten-free can be challenging, I often recommend beginners start with recipes that someone else has already altered. Revisit [Choosing a Recipe and Gluten-Free Flour](#) within the [Gluten-Free](#) subsection of the [Common Dietary Limitations](#) section in [Part I](#) for valuable information on gluten-free recipes and flours.

Another example of a tricky ingredient to substitute is eggs. Eggs add moisture and act as a binder, leavening agent, thickener, and more. They're a powerhouse in the baking world. They're also one of the nine major allergens, which means quite a few people can't have them. To find a suitable substitute, you'll need to have a basic understanding of what the egg in your recipe is doing. In quick breads, something like mashed banana, applesauce, or even oil may be able to take the place of the egg. In something that needs more structure, chia seeds, ground flaxseed, or ground psyllium husk mixed with the appropriate amount of water may work. If none of these options work for you or your recipe, there are store-bought egg replacements located in the baking aisle (just be sure the product's ingredients are safe for your guest).

## Holiday and Event-Specific Tips and Tricks

One last ingredient I'll caution you about when altering recipes is the sweetener. Sugar does more than just add flavor. It also adds moisture and stability and helps with leavening (if yeast is involved) and browning. Substitutes need to be chosen wisely based on sugar's role in the recipe. Quick breads can often tolerate liquid sweeteners like honey, maple syrup, and agave or even powdered sweeteners like monk fruit. Zero-calorie sweeteners, like stevia, or artificial sweeteners can also be used, but they may change the outcome or create an unappealing aftertaste. A quick internet search will tell you how to properly adjust for each sweetener. Things like cookies, pastries, pie fillings, etc. will require more tweaking to accommodate an alternate sweetener. With these types of baked goods, I suggest finding a recipe online that contains the alteration you need. It'll save you a lot of time.

Over the years, I've made all sorts of alterations to recipes—gluten-free, dairy-free, low FODMAP, autoimmune protocol (AIP), no refined sugar, soy-free, corn-free, nut-free, egg-free, and on and on. I'm not telling you this to brag, but to show you it's possible to find or alter recipes to fit just about any dietary requirement. You can do this!



### Simple Swaps and Ways to Accommodate

I want to set you and your event up for success. To do that, I want to give you some additional tips and tricks that may take a little more planning on the front end but will simplify things and add a level of ease and protection the day of your event. Use what applies to you and leave what doesn't.

- **Consider using disposable dinnerware and utensils.** If your guest has a severe allergy or sensitivity, it may be best to use disposable cookware, plates, utensils, etc. wherever possible. This will create more waste, but it will cut down on the risk of cross contact and will make cleanup a cinch. Whatever items of your own you use, be sure to wash them properly with a new sponge or brush.
- **If you're going to have veggies with dip, separate the dip.** You can do this by getting disposable cups (paper if you want cheap, clear plastic if you want something a little fancier), fill the bottom with dip, and place julienne/sticks of veggies inside. Then, to accommodate a potential dietary limitation (or even for those who don't like ranch or cream-based dressings), have some cups with only veggies.
- **Keep add-ins away from the food they go with, preferably with the condiments.** For example, if you have a salad, keep the dressing, croutons, cheese, etc. with the condiments. This will help prevent the salad from being contaminated by offending ingredients. To avoid confusion, you can put a small sign that indicates toppings, dressings, and/or add-ins are located by the condiments.

## Simple Swaps and Ways to Accommodate

- **Put cheese on the side whenever possible.** Allow people to add their own cheese and keep it away from the food it goes with to prevent cross contact. This allows guests to choose whether they want cheese on their food. If cheese needs to be melted on top, consider making portions without the cheese.
- **If butter or margarine is going to be needed by nearly everyone, put small dollops in disposable cups with lids for those with a dietary limitation.** Using these disposable cups for everyone is an option, but it could create unnecessary waste and use up time and money. Regardless of how many you think you'll need, make extra and keep some in reserve in the fridge. The unused margarine or butter can always be used later, so it won't go to waste. This method keeps your guest safe (as long as the margarine or butter was new from the beginning—remember, no cross contact) and allows everyone else to use the same butter/margarine the day of. Just be sure to specify that the individual portions are for those with dietary restrictions. Prepackaged portions are an option, but they usually only come in large quantities, which is great for large events, but not small events. If you go this route, be sure to verify with your guest that the ingredients check out.
- **Use dairy-free margarine (check the ingredients to be sure that it's truly dairy-free) in all the dishes.** Margarine rarely alters the result of most dishes. I imagine professional chefs would disagree, but when you're talking about home cooking or baking, margarine can easily take the place of butter in most dishes. There are exceptions, but a quick internet search will let you know if your recipe is one of those rare cases.

## Simple Swaps and Ways to Accommodate

- **Lactose-free or dairy-free milks can be used in place of cow's milk without much issue.** Lactose-free milk will behave nearly the exact same as cow's milk. I say nearly because there's often more sugar in lactose-free milk to compensate for the lack of lactose. Taste wise, it's not very noticeable, but it could make a nominal difference in the result of a baked item. Dairy-free nut or grain milks may change the flavor of your dish a little, but they can be an easy swap. In fact, they actually add a yummy creaminess.
- **Dairy-free buttermilk is super easy to make.** One tablespoon of lemon juice, distilled white vinegar, or apple cider vinegar added to one cup of soy milk or almond milk can work as a great substitute for buttermilk (coconut milk won't work because it doesn't curdle). I personally use lemon juice, but the others can work in a pinch. It may be tempting to replace buttermilk with an unaltered milk alternative, but this could negatively impact your recipe, since the acidity in buttermilk is often needed for the final product to turn out right.
- **Canned coconut milk or coconut cream can be used in place of heavy whipping cream in most recipes.** Coconut milk in a carton will not work for this. It must be canned. Usually, you'll need to chill the canned coconut milk or cream ahead of time so that the fat fully separates from the liquid (the cream rises to the top of the can, while the liquid collects at the bottom). Some recipes call for both the cream and the liquid, while others only require the cream. Canned coconut cream can even be used to make a dairy-free alternative to whipped cream. Coconut ingredients will impart a nuttier flavor to your dish, but I've found they often enhance the richness.

## Simple Swaps and Ways to Accommodate

- **Oil can be used in place of butter in many recipes.** I suggest doing an internet search to verify whether it's okay in your type of recipe, but oil can be a suitable substitute in many cases, especially if the recipe calls for melted butter. The fat content of butter and oil is different, though, so I suggest using a little less oil than the amount of butter the recipe calls for.
- **Snack foods that accommodate different limitations can be easy to find.** Most stores carry things like gluten-free pretzels and crackers. Some brands are also free of common allergens. You can also use the Fig, ShopWell – Better Food Choices, or Spoonful: Food Scanner apps to scan barcodes at the store. This can get tedious, though, so I suggest doing an internet search for products that are free of whatever ingredient your guest can't have. From there, you can either check the brand's website to see if they show which stores in your area carry their products or check your local store's website/app to see if they carry it. Doing this ahead of time will save you a ton of time at the store. Just be sure to check with your guest that the food you found is safe for them to eat.
- **Tamari sauce can be used in place of soy sauce as a gluten-free option.** Soy sauce contains wheat, but tamari sauce does not. Be advised, though, that both options contain soy. Also, tamari sauce is saltier than regular soy sauce, so adjust your recipe as needed. If soy is an issue, coconut aminos can be used in place of soy sauce and tamari sauce. In my experience, coconut amino brands vary in taste, so go slow when adding it to your dish (and also know that most brands have a sweet taste).

## The Day of Your Event

### Pull Your Guest Aside

Let's say the day of your event comes and you've had limited contact with your guest. You knew they were gluten-free, so you bought some gluten-free items, a new butter, and prepared as best you could. It's okay if that's what happened. Life doesn't always go to plan or work out ideally, right?

If that's where you find yourself, ask to speak to your guest privately. You don't need to make it seem mysterious or secretive. Simply ask to talk to them about the food. Away from the other guests, you can explain which foods are safe for them, the steps you've taken, and the plan you have for food service. As discussed earlier, you want to do this type of thing away from the crowd so your guest doesn't feel like all eyes are on them.

Also, if the guest wasn't involved in the menu planning, it's a good idea to offer to let them see the ingredients you used in making the food. Let them be the judge of whether the ingredients are safe for them. Please don't ask them to take your word for it or tell them that you're sure everything is safe. Their health depends on you being right, and that's a huge risk for them. They aren't trying to insult you if they ask to see the ingredients. Being open and honest with them about everything that went into the food will build trust and help them feel more at ease.

## Pull Your Guest Aside

Even if you have been in contact with your guest ahead of time, pulling them aside and explaining the same three things (which foods are safe, the steps you took, and the plan for serving the food) is still important. You want them to feel confident in their food choices and know what's going on.

Regardless of whether your guest was involved in the menu planning process or not, you can take your hosting skills to the next level by following an earlier pro tip (located in the Questions to Ask Beforehand section) of taking pictures of each ingredient's wrapper/packaging. Even if your guest doesn't take advantage of the pictures while they're at your event, you can explain that you'll keep them for a few days in case they have a negative reaction. This can add a level of reassurance and comfort that your guest will rarely experience outside of their own home, and they'll be so incredibly thankful you took this step!

Also, keep in mind that things may not go according to plan. Maybe the wrong ingredient gets used or cross contact happens, making the food unsafe for your guest. It's okay. There's no need to feel guilty or embarrassed. Your guest understands that things happen. If you didn't remember to follow the pro tip of keeping out portions of the safe foods, simply ask the guest how you can help make it right. Your guest likely knows what they can easily make with a set of ingredients, so work with them to alter the food on hand or make something quick and easy. This could create extra work for you, but I hope you realize it's worth it to gain your guest's trust and to keep them safe.

### **Phrasing with Other Guests**

As mentioned in the *Hurtful Comments Can Cause Unseen Damage* section in Part I, the way you address the other guests and handle the lead up to serving the food matters. You don't want to draw unnecessary attention to your guest's limitation(s). Instead of labeling the food with the person's name, announcing that certain foods are only for [insert person's name], talking about how you made the food a special way just for [insert person's name], etc., reframe things in a way that conveys the necessary information while simultaneously keeping the attention off your guest.

Like we covered previously, instead of labels with the person's name, you could simply label the food as dairy-free, gluten-free, nut-free, etc. Instead of naming the person in an announcement, you could simply say to the group that you've prepared or have some sugar-free, vegan, soy-free, etc. food for those who have dietary limitations.

Before you serve the food or allow people to serve themselves, you'll want to be clear about the system you have in place, which we explored in the *Preparing to Serve the Food* section. You may feel a bit like a schoolteacher, but it's important that you have everyone's attention. Side conversations will distract the people talking and the people around them.

## Phrasing with Other Guests

Once you've gotten everyone's attention by saying you have some important instructions to share, you'll want to do the following:

- Explain that you have [insert type of food—gluten-free, vegan, egg-free, etc.] food for certain guests with dietary limitations.
- Ask guests to leave the specialty food for those who need it (at least until everyone has been served).
- Outline your plan for serving the food and preventing foods from getting mixed (cross contact).
- Ask them to follow the system so everyone can have a pleasant and safe experience.

During the course of the meal, especially if you have guests serve themselves buffet style, you may hear people making comments about the specialty food. And to be honest, this may be one of the harder parts about hosting someone with a dietary limitation. “I’m glad I don’t have to eat that.” “That doesn’t look very appetizing.” “\_\_\_-free is such a joke.” “Oh, just use this spoon. No one will know.” And so on. As the host, you don’t want to ruin the experience of one or two people for the sake of another, so navigating this is hard.

What I encourage you to do is to step in when the safety of your guest with the dietary limitation is at risk or if their feelings could be hurt. In these moments, it’s possible to say something so all parties feel loved. If it’s a safety issue, remind the guest making the comments that you have a system in place and ask them to use the proper utensil (or whatever corrective action needs taken). If it’s a hurtful comment, I suggest speaking to the person privately. You don’t need to name the person with the dietary limitation during the conversation, but you can let them know that their comment went too far.

## Checklist

It's the day of your event! You're preparing your table, getting ready for guests, and feeling excited! Double or triple check that you have the following:

- New, disposable, or carefully cleaned serving utensils, dinnerware, and silverware
- Condiments, sauces, dips, add-ins, etc. away from the main foods
- Labeled condiments and add-ins if they're for gluten-free, dairy-free, vegan, etc. guests only
- Your individual portions of condiments like butter/margarine **OR** a new butter/margarine for the guest with the limitation
- Portions of safe foods kept in reserve in case there's cross contact (optional, but highly suggested)
- Everything you need to designate/label the specialty foods—signs on clips, toothpick signs, color-coded utensils and dishes, signs explaining the food service system, etc.
- Recipes and pictures of wrappers/packages in case guests would like to see them



### Follow Up with Your Guest

Whenever possible, follow up with your guest two or three days after your event. Here's what to say when you do:

1. Tell them how happy you were to have them at your event. This lets them know they weren't the inconvenience or burden they may have felt they were.
2. Ask them if they ended up having a reaction to anything at the event. Wording it as "reaction" helps keep them from feeling awkward if their symptoms are unpleasant or embarrassing.
3. Whether they say they had a reaction or not, ask them what you can do better next time. Even if it never works out for them to attend another of your events, this allows you to connect with them one more time and can help you better host other guests.

It's important to not be offended, hurt, or hard on yourself if your guest had a reaction despite your best efforts. Negative reactions to food are a part of this guest's life, so please don't feel too bad. And as tempting as it may be, please don't feel like you can never again invite guests with dietary limitations. See it for what it is—a learning experience. Then work with the person to understand what may have happened so you can prevent it from happening again. Life is lived through trial and error, and hosting someone with special dietary needs is no exception.

## A Quick Love Note from Me

Here's what was said at the beginning of our journey together in Part 1: *“As the host, you may be feeling anxious about preparing for someone with a dietary limitation. Maybe you're afraid of messing something up, embarrassing yourself or them, making them sick, or offending them. Hosting someone with a limitation can feel big and overwhelming at times, and at first, the length of this guide may add to that fear. Maybe it's enough to make you doubt yourself or make you wish you could back out. Let me just say this: it's okay to feel that way. Doing something new, especially when it could impact someone's health, can be scary. Your feelings are normal, so feel confident in putting them aside for now. Later, once we've made it through the guide, you can return to these feelings and say, 'Nope! I can do this!'”*

Let's acknowledge that you may still be feeling that way, even though you've gained a ton of tools and knowledge from this guide. Give yourself some extra grace and know that it's okay. You're on the verge of doing something new. You've gained the knowledge you need to succeed, but now comes the scary part: the doing. But like with all new adventures, we have to leave the safety of gaining knowledge and enter the arena of doing. I have every faith in you. I know you can do this.

Want to know how I know? Because of your heart. You just read an entire guide to learn how to host someone well (even if you skipped around). You took the time to enter your guest's world to understand them better. That alone is a gift that will build a deep connection between you and your guest. Everyone wants to belong somewhere, and you're extending your hand and your heart, if only for one meal.

## A Quick Love Note from Me

Please hear me when I say this: there's no greater honor than being trusted by someone with a dietary limitation. For them, it's almost like a debt or a love they'll never be able to repay. And that only becomes truer when the person has a severe sensitivity. You'll feel like home away from home, and the value of that can't be understated. The imprint and legacy you leave with that person will be profound, beautiful, lifelong, and worth it.

And in case you didn't know, I'm proud of you. Maybe you haven't heard that in a long time. Or maybe you aren't sure why I would say that to someone I haven't met. But what you may not know is that you and I are already connected. The information in this guide is my life on a page. You've been seeing into my heart without even realizing it. And even though it's scary to be open and vulnerable about something I've worked so hard to downplay at different times in my life, I'd do this a hundred times again to help build a safe and loving space for someone else living a similar story.

Perfection is not the goal, empathy is. So go out there and be brave. Do this for you—to show yourself you can achieve amazing, soul-touching things. Do this for your guest—to show them you see them and love them. Do this for the people everywhere who don't have someone like you—to spark a movement and a change. Do this to take yourself and others one step closer to the place we all want to be—the place where we are known and loved for who we are. And when doubt tries to creep in, say to it, “Nope. I can do this!”

Hugs and blessings,

Bethany



**Part III: Resources**

# Glossary

The world of dietary limitations comes with a language all its own, which can be overwhelming and stressful. You might even find that people with dietary limitations don't use the correct terms, but it's still important that you have the right foundation. From there, you can meet your guest where they are. I did my best to keep these definitions simple and to keep the glossary a manageable length. All that said, here are some common terms to get you started on your journey:

**1:1 gluten-free flour**—A combination of gluten-free flours, starches, and gums designed to mimic wheat flour as closely as possible.

**Anaphylaxis**—A severe, full-body immune response that can be life-threatening.

**Autoimmune disease/reaction**—A condition where the immune system sees the body's own cells as foreign invaders and attacks them.

**Blood sugar level**—The measure of glucose in the blood.

**Casein and whey**—Two milk proteins that are often added to other foods and products.

**Cross contact**—When food with an allergen or other off-limits ingredient accidentally comes in contact with a food that's free of that allergen/ingredient during preparation, production, or service, thereby contaminating the once safe food.

## Glossary

**Cross contamination**—A food safety term that describes when bacteria or harmful substances in one food come in contact with another previously uncontaminated food (example: raw meat touching fresh vegetables).

**Dairy alternative**—A food item that can be used in place of dairy, such as vegan cheese.

**Dairy-free**—Products that do not contain any milk or milk derivatives.

**Digestive enzyme**—Needed by the body to break larger things down into smaller, individual components, thereby allowing the most basic forms of the nutrients to be available for absorption.

**Disaccharides**—Two sugars paired together, such as lactose (dairy) and sucrose (table sugar).

**Diverticula**—Small pouches that can form in the lining of the large intestine.

**Diverticulitis**—Inflammation or infection of the diverticula that can form within the lining of the large intestine.

**Diverticulosis**—A condition where a person's intestine develops small pouches called diverticula.

**Flexitarian**—A vegetarian that will occasionally eat animal products like meat, eggs, and dairy.

**Flour substitute**—A product meant to be used in place of gluten-containing flours.

**FODMAP (Fermentable Oligosaccharides, Disaccharides, Monosaccharides, and Polyols)**—Simple starches and sugars in foods and drinks that are easily broken down and fermented by bacteria in the large intestine causing unpleasant symptoms in some people.

**Food allergen**—Component within a food that triggers an immune response in some people.

**Food allergy**—When the immune system interprets a food as a threat and triggers an immune response; symptoms vary but can include anaphylaxis.

**Food intolerance**—When the body is unable to properly break down something within a food, which often causes mild to severe symptoms; not related to the immune system.

**Food sensitivity**—When a person is sensitive to a protein, chemical, or ingredient, and they experience unpleasant symptoms as a result of being exposed; may include the immune system.

**Fructose**—Simple sugar found in fruit, honey, agave, corn syrup, high-fructose corn syrup, and even some vegetables.

**Glucose**—Simple sugar that makes up many other sugars and starches; primary source of energy for the body.

## Glossary

**Gluten**—A group of proteins found in wheat, barley, rye, and their hybrids that are responsible for the characteristic rise, structure, and sponginess of baked goods.

**Halal**—Foods that meet the requirements of Islamic dietary laws.

**Insulin resistance**—When cells become less sensitive to the effects of insulin and therefore can't absorb glucose as well.

**Insulin**—Hormone that allows cells to accept glucose from the blood.

**Kosher**—Foods that meet the requirements of Jewish dietary laws.

**Lactase**—Digestive enzyme that breaks down lactose.

**Lacto-ovo-vegetarian**—A vegetarian who will occasionally eat milk and eggs.

**Lactose intolerance**—The inability to properly break down lactose due to a lack of the enzyme lactase.

**Lactose-free**—Cow's milk that has been altered by use of an enzyme to break down the lactose within the milk. NOTE: lactose-free cow's milk often still contains small amounts of lactose and may not be appropriate for all lactose-intolerant guests; please ask your guest before using.

**Lactose**—Simple sugar found in dairy products.

**Lacto-vegetarian**—A vegetarian who will occasionally eat dairy products.

**Low-carb diet**—A diet that focuses on getting calories from lean protein and healthy fats, rather than carbs.

**Major nine allergens**—The nine most common allergens, including eggs, fish, milk, peanuts, sesame, shellfish, soy, tree nuts, and wheat; must be prominently displayed on ingredient lists.

**Milk alternative/substitute**—Any nut or grain milk that is used in place of cow's milk.

**Milk derivatives**—Components of milk that are isolated and added to other products.

**Milk protein allergy**—allergy that triggers an immune response when the person is exposed to certain proteins within dairy.

**Monosaccharides**—A single sugar, such as glucose, used to build larger sugars.

**Monosodium glutamate (MSG)**—Food additive that enhances flavor; common in many Asian, Mexican, and processed food; natural forms of the compound can be found in some foods.

**Non-dairy**—Products that may contain dairy derivatives.

**Oligosaccharides**—Sugars that contain 3–10 monosaccharides.

## Glossary

**Ovo-vegetarian**—A vegetarian who will occasionally eat eggs.

**Pescatarian**—A vegetarian who will occasionally eat fish and seafood.

**Polyols**—Sugar alcohols found naturally in some fruits and vegetables but are often used in sugar-free foods (examples: sorbitol and xylitol).

**Saccharides**—Includes sugars, starches, and fibers; another name for carbohydrates.

**Sucrose**—Common table sugar; a disaccharide.

**Sugar alcohols**—A type of sugar found in many fruits and vegetables that provides sweetness with fewer calories; often used in sugar-free foods (examples: sorbitol and xylitol).

**Veganism**—A diet and/or lifestyle that strictly focuses on getting nutrients from plant-based food sources and eliminating the consumption (and sometimes the use) of animal products.

**Vegetarianism**—A diet and/or lifestyle that focuses on getting nutrients from plant-based food sources; forms of vegetarianism may incorporate moderate amounts of certain animal products.

**Villi and Microvilli**—Tiny finger-like projections in the small intestine that help the body absorb nutrients from food.

## Helpful Links, Internet Searches, and Apps

I know how helpful it can be to have everything in one, easy to access location, so in this section, I've compiled the resource, search, and app suggestions made throughout the guide. Happy searching and learning!

### Helpful Links

#### Health Conditions

Celiac Disease Foundation

<https://celiac.org/>

National Celiac Association

<https://nationalceliac.org/about/>

American Diabetes Association

<https://diabetes.org/>

International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders: Diverticulosis and Diverticulitis

<https://iffgd.org/gi-disorders/diverticulosis-and-diverticulitis/>

Mayo Clinic: Diverticulitis

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/diverticulitis/symptoms-causes/syc-20371758>

FARE.org (Food Allergy Research and Education)

<https://www.foodallergy.org/>

International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders: Food Allergies

<https://iffgd.org/gi-disorders/food-allergies/>

International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders: IBS

<https://iffgd.org/gi-disorders/irritable-bowel-syndrome/>

### **Common Dietary Limitations**

Vegan.com (NOTE: This website has good information, but it is rather opinionated.)

<https://vegan.com/info/dairy-free/>

Very Well Health: Dairy-Free Diet

<https://www.verywellhealth.com/dairy-free-diet-5216769>

FDA: Allergen Removal

<https://www.fda.gov/food/retail-food-protection/allergen-removal-and-transfer-using-wiping-and-cleaning-methods-retail-food-establishments>

National Celiac Association: Depiction of Gluten Thresholds

<https://nationalceliac.org/celiac-disease-questions/understanding-gluten-levels/>

Gluten Intolerance Group: Getting Started on a Gluten-Free Diet

<https://gluten.org/2019/10/14/getting-started-on-a-gluten-free-diet/>

## Helpful Links, Internet Searches, and Apps

Everyday Health: Overview

<https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/diet/low-carb-diet-beginners-guide-food-list-meal-plan-tips/>

Everyday Health: Popular Low-carb Diets

<https://www.everydayhealth.com/diet-nutrition/diet/low-carb-diets-keto-low-carb-paleo-atkins-more/>

Monash University: FODMAP Overview

<https://www.monashfodmap.com/>

Healthline: Vegetarian Diet Overview

<https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/vegetarian-diet-plan#foods-to-avoid>

Vegan.com: General Info

<https://vegan.com/info/>

### Helpful Internet Searches

Search for “best [insert recipe name]” for top rated recipes. For example, “best gluten-free brownies,” “best dairy-free eggnog,” “best vegan entrees,” etc.

Search a product’s website to find stores near you that carry the item you’re looking for. Another way of doing it is to search local grocery store websites or apps to see if they carry the product at a nearby location. Coupons are also often available online, so search for “[product name] coupon.”

## Helpful Links, Internet Searches, and Apps

Search for “elegant” or “upscale” when looking for fancier disposable dinnerware and silverware options.

Search “recipe generator from ingredients” or “recipes from ingredients I have” to find websites that will give you recipes based on the ingredients you have on hand.

Search for “toothpick food signs for party buffet” or “white flag cupcake toppers” to find toothpick signs you can write on.

### **Helpful Apps**

Allrecipes: Easy Recipe Ideas (also a website)

Fig

Pinterest (also a website)

ShopWell – Better Food Choices

Spoonful: Food Scanner

Yummly Recipes & Cooking Tools

## Notes

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