

EATING OUT ON AIP

While eating meals you cooked and know are free of cross-contamination and non-compliant ingredients is ideal, it's unrealistic to think that you may not go out to eat while on AIP. Like everything with AIP, planning ahead can take away from the stress and help you to be successful, but even last minute meals can be done while on AIP.

Here are some tips to navigate dining out:

You'll have a better chance of getting what you need at higher-end restaurants and restaurants that have chefs that create their own food. Chain restaurants tend to have cooks that are trained to make specific dishes and sometimes don't know how to or cannot stray from that (their ingredients may be from a centralized location, shipped to them and cannot be modified). There are restaurants, for example, where the burgers are pre-made in an industrial kitchen and include things like wheat, soy-sauce, corn and preservatives.

Many times the chefs at higher-end restaurants or small, local restaurants actually welcome the "challenge" of feeding someone with restrictions, or at least can accommodate you.

Steps to have a great meal (that won't make you sick):

1. Find a restaurant that may be accommodating. It's a good idea to do a search for places that already know about allergies. So you could ask someone you know that has a food allergy where they like to dine, or to do an internet search for "restaurant" + "gluten-free", "allergy", "celiac" or even "vegan". These restaurants at least won't look at you like you have 15 heads when you explain you have restrictions and should be aware of the necessary steps to be cautious with your food.

A good app to search for gluten-free restaurants, for example, is the Find Me Gluten Free app. If you're traveling, Trip Advisor also tends to have good information on these sorts of restaurants from people who've been there.

2. Take a look at the menu. These days most restaurants have a copy of their menu online that you can look through. Look for the menu items that are already gluten-free, dairy-free, or vegan to start (or have the option to be these) as the chef is probably used to paying attention to these dishes for allergies.



3. Choose 2-3 dishes that sound good to you. Write these down so you can remember them for the next step.

4. Call the restaurant and ask if you can speak to the chef or someone regarding your food restrictions and modifying your meal. Do this 24-48 hours prior to going to the restaurant if possible. If you are making reservations for 2 months from now, call to make sure they'll be able to accommodate you, but then you may also want to call again the day or two before to confirm or go over details. Also call mid-afternoon and NOT during the lunch or dinner rush. Chances are if you call during the rush, you'll not be able to speak to anyone, and you'll just be annoying everyone as they are BUSY.

When you speak to the chef (or the person who can help you, it may be the manager), mention you're on a special diet with lots of restrictions for health reasons. You can also choose to mention you may have some allergies you are trying to figure out as it's sad, but sometimes people won't take you seriously unless you use the word "allergy". If you DO have a known allergy or sensitivity make sure to mention that too.

**Note - at this point if the person seems really confused or put out by you, you may want to rethink eating here as they may not understand cross-contamination or care whether you actually get what you want/need.*

It's often easier to mention the foods that you CAN eat rather than can't, so providing a long list of the AIP "NO" ingredients may not be helpful unless they ask. (Think back to when you first heard what you couldn't have - it's a lot!) Rather, mention those 2-3 dishes that you chose in step 3 and ask, "can we see if any of these will fit in with my restrictions?".

For example, if there's a "Pork Chop with braised greens and butternut squash mash" on the menu you could ask "Do you marinate the pork chop? Is there a way I could get the pork chop, unmarinated, with just salt and cooked with olive oil? And then the braised greens - what's it braised in? Can I get that without the paprika? And the butternut squash - do you mix that with any butter or dairy? Could I get a side of plain steamed broccoli instead?"

If necessary you may have to go super bland, with something like a pork chop with salt and steamed broccoli, but you can always bring some spices/herbs from home or even sauces from home to dress it up. The more complicated you make it for the chef, the less likely it is that you'll get what you want and need.

Also ask if it's easier for them to accommodate you if you come at a less busy time.



5. When you arrive at the restaurant, mention to your server that you have food restrictions and already called and spoke with the chef (or the person you talked to) and if possible, mention their name.

If you've already decided with the chef what you're going to eat, reiterate this to the server. Often times the chef may even come out to confirm with you again (usually an advantage of going at less busy times).

If you are eating there last-minute and/or didn't call the restaurant ahead of time, it's often best to just think of some super easy meal to make with the proteins and veggies you see on the menu. Mention to your server that you are on a very restrictive diet for health reasons and that you want to make this as easy as possible. So, for example, you could ask, "could I just get some of the halibut with just salt. It's important that there are no other seasonings. And could I get it cooked in olive oil and in a clean pan? And then a side of steamed broccoli and cauliflower - no seasonings or butter? If any substitutions need to be made can you please come back and check with me to make sure they're ok? Thanks so much!"

If you can, think of how items are typically prepared, so a grilled steak, for example, is more likely going to be cross-contaminated with gluten or other non-AIP items because the grill is a shared cooking implement. But a pan-seared steak can be prepared in a clean pan.

Same goes for things like sweet potato fries - many times they'll also be prepared in a fryer that cooks onion rings and other glutenous fried foods. Though some restaurants, like Red Robin, do cook in a separate gluten-free fryer when requested. These are the things to ask.

Again, you can always dress up your meal with salt, herbs and spices from home, and sauces from home.

6. Thank everyone - after all, they most likely went out of their way for you. Verbally thank your server and if possible, the chef and/or manager. A bigger tip than usual is always appreciated. Sometimes you can even tip the chef if he/she really went out of their way.

Also, if a restaurant really did a great job, leave a review on Trip Advisor and/or Find Me Gluten-Free or mention them on social media so that others can know they'll be treated right as well.



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