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## CROSS CONTAMINATION TIPS FROM THE NFCA

References: [www.CeliacCentral.org](http://www.CeliacCentral.org)

- Kristin Voorhees** NFCA Healthcare Relations Manager, webinar organizer and presenter.
- Ken Schelper** Davanni's Vice President, Board of Directors for Minnesota Restaurant Association
- Amy Jones** Chief Clinical Dietician and Celiac Support Group Facilitator, Mary Rutan Hospital
- Pam Cureton** Clinical and Research Dietician, Center for Celiac Research, University of Maryland (works with Dr. Fasano)

### **Ken Schelper** What is required for safe service?

1. A clear understanding of the customer's needs. There must be total transparency and clear communication. Call ahead of time and when restaurant is not busy.
2. Correct identification of whether gluten or other allergens are present. This MUST be done in advance by restaurant. It is impractical or impossible to identify allergens on the spur of the moment.
3. Identification of risk of c/c of safe food through direct or indirect contact.

### **Issue of education**

The food service must start here.

Pre-2009 all industry training focused on contamination (e.g. hairs, cleaning fluid) and pathogens, rather than

allergens. In 2009 allergens were introduced to the food code, and therefore included in industry training courses. However, there is still no standardized industry training that mentions gluten per se. Fortunately, the safeguards against allergens are the same as those required against gluten.

Education within each operation- three levels of training.

Certified food manager (CFM) at top of the operation, one per operation by law. Usually the general manager or owner, or maybe the head chef. Has undertaken approved and standardised training, must be re-certified every three years. Therefore, by the end of 2012, all CFMs will have undergone the essential training on safely serving those with allergies. CFM responsible for setting up food safety systems and training within the operation.

Next is the Person In Charge, who must have the knowledge to enforce rules and is trained by the CFM. They are in charge when the CFM isn't present.

Individual food workers are at the bottom of the chain. Must know and follow basic food safety rules.

Knowledge starts with CFM and must filter down the chain, and this takes time. This is complicated by high turnover of food service workers.

When visiting a restaurant, ask for the general manager, or if unavailable ask for the Person in Charge or the chef.

## Challenges for Foodservice Operations

Making sure gluten isn't present in recipe or ingredient. This is impossible to do with confidence on the spur of the moment.

- Recipes may contain many ingredients, and each ingredient may contain many ingredients.
- Wholesale food labels are not required by law to disclose the presence of gluten, and only a few producers are going through the process of certifying wholesale foods gluten-free. Wholesale foods can contain ingredients which differ from retail foods.
- Ingredients statements are required on the master case of bulk purchases, but not on the individual packages that the chef can see in the kitchen.
- Many recipes are prepared ahead of time and stored, so kitchen workers wouldn't be able to check ingredients.
- Managers and workers are not currently educated about celiac disease and the range of ingredients that contain gluten, so they don't know what they're looking for.
- For some "secret recipes" the ingredients aren't revealed to the operators.
- Changing daily specials can mean that workers are unfamiliar with the ingredients.

The next challenge is to make sure that gluten isn't introduced accidentally to what was safe food. The industry is used to protecting food against pathogens, rather than allergens, which are an integral part of the food itself. Within industry training "cross-contamination" refers to pathogens, and "cross-contact" refers to allergens. Some of the measures to prevent cross-contamination will also protect against cross-contact. However, chemical sanitising or heat are often used against pathogens, and these are ineffective against allergens. The only ways to protect against allergens are total segregation and cleaning.

Points of potential cross-contact- deep fat fryers, shared serving areas, broilers, grills, cutting boards, scales, workers' hands. Menu items prepared in stages by different employees, restaurant preparing other orders simultaneously. Airborne contaminants such as flour.

In food safety regulations "clean" is defined as "free of visible soil". Currently no way to measure whether a surface is clean enough.

As long as staff are doing a diligent job with soap and water it should be ok, but this might not be the case during busy times. Ask how work surfaces will be cleaned where food will be prepared. Anything which has been through the dishwashing process will be fine at the point of leaving the dishwasher.

## Disclaimers

All operations need to have a disclaimer for legal reasons, to limit liability.

A disclaimer should also provide useful information to allow the consumer to assess the risks. A bad disclaimer will have an unwelcoming blanket warning. A more useful disclaimer will warn of more specific risks. A much better disclaimer will welcome customers and provide significant information on the systems in place and how much knowledge the operation has. It will encourage direct communication with the most knowledgeable person present. And it ultimately leaves the final decision up to the customer.

Customers with gluten-related disorders must learn to distinguish between those operations that are jumping on the gluten-free bandwagon, and those who are willing to do the work and make the investment necessary to safely serve you. Disclaimers can give you an idea of which type of restaurant this is.

Ultimately, each food service operation must decide whether or not to make the commitment to serve those with special dietary needs and therefore implement the internal systems and training necessary. NFCA and other advocacy groups have materials available to help restaurants that decide to do this.

**Amy Jones**

### The emotional aspect of being on a gluten-free diet

Research has been undertaken into quality of life for celiac patients- Sverker, Hensing and Hallert, 2005. Initially, quality of life improves due patients to feeling much better. Eight years later quality of life is lower than the non-celiac control group. Women have lower quality of life scores than men, it appears due to impact on socialisation. Dining out is a huge problem. Swedish study found that celiacs suffer from isolation and exclusion, there is a fear of being glutened relating to letting go of control when eating out. Participants disappointed by lack of knowledge in restaurant staff. Worry about being a bother. Some participants would rather eat gluten-containing foods than disclose their condition to others. When the “high” of diagnosis has worn off, anger can emerge. Unwanted visibility- this affects people depending on their personality. Friends becoming too focused on gluten-free diet. Neglect and/or being forgotten. Some relationships do not survive. Sometimes neglect is due to the other person’s fear- they are afraid they’ll make a mistake so it is easier not to try, or fear of chronic illnesses in general. Constantly being “on call” and loss of spontaneity. Changes in social life- invitations become a source of worry rather than pleasure.

Recommends reading ‘After the Diagnosis’ by Dr. LeMaistre about the stages of emotional wellness after diagnosis with any chronic illness. Importance of the reconstruction phrase of working out who you are going to be with celiac disease. A person who is not in reconstruction may avoid eating in restaurants altogether, or may take unnecessary risks. Each individual needs to work out what works for them. Dealing with setbacks positively. Reconstructing your life.

Renewal- accepting the diagnosis and working out what you can do given the limitations of the gluten-free diet. Developing a ‘new normal’. Dealing with fear of the future in a healthy way.

Dealing with disappointment and jealousy. Working on not becoming socially isolated.

Closes with a positive affirmation regarding accepting one’s condition, limitations and feelings, and having as positive a life as possible.

Is it better if your spouse also goes gluten-free? She has never seen anyone have problems due to spouse not being gluten-free. But do what works for you.

Before dining out you need a thorough knowledge of the gluten-free diet and all the ingredients to avoid and cc risks. It is useful if you know about how cookery so you will have a rough idea of ingredients. Read restaurant menus online in advance.

Identify your need at the hostess station immediately. Ask if they have a gluten-free menu. Recommends saying you have a “severe food allergy”, despite inaccuracy, in order to be taken seriously. Otherwise restaurant staff might assume you are following a fad diet and be less vigilant.

Rather than saying gluten-free, be specific about the ingredients you are concerned about. You could take a restaurant card. Make very specific orders.

Phoning ahead is a good idea. If you are shy about making a fuss you could do some groundwork before you go. Call at a quiet time and get the person’s name.

If the waiter looks confused ask to speak to the manager or chef.

Use your knowledge of how dishes are prepared to ask the right questions in the restaurant. But be aware that restaurants can prepare dishes in very different ways to at home e.g. flour added to omelettes.

If you don’t recognize a dish or ingredient ask what it is or ask to leave it out.

If you aren’t confident it’s best to order something plain, always have a few ideas just in case. But you still need to ask at every step.

Beware of cross-contact, even for special gluten-free dishes. You need to ask about the prep of the item and how cross-contact is prevented.

Check with the server at each course that it is definitely the gluten free item.

Never be afraid to send back unsafe food. You could cut it to make sure they don’t just send it right back out to you.

Get staff on your side, be friendly rather than overbearing. But you must be firm.

If you do have a safe experience you need to praise the establishment and send word back to the chef. Leave a good tip. Share the information with others. Build a relationship with them, so that you can have it as a safe place in the future.

If you have a celiac child, it is good to call the restaurant in advance together. They need to learn how to do it for themselves so it is good for them to learn from the parent.

Making the whole household go gluten-free is up to you, but make sure everyone is tested before they go gluten-free. It is also a very expensive option as gluten-free food is more expensive. Also, children need to learn how to deal with being surrounded by gluten-eaters in life.

Recommends-‘Let’s Eat Out!’ Gluten-free passport guides, use of apps, Allergy Eats, and Triumph Dining cards.

Do not be afraid to travel to Europe.

Resources for travel-Select Wisely, Italian Celiac Association, Gluten Free on the Go, [www.glutenfreeguidebook.com/south-america](http://www.glutenfreeguidebook.com/south-america), [www.bobandruths.com](http://www.bobandruths.com), the Celiac Scene (Canada), Gluten-Free Travel Site.

