

Don't forget food allergies when hosting your holiday party

Holidays, birthdays and the opportunity to unwind with good friends and some conversation are just a few of the reasons to host parties at home. Hosts and hostesses have several things to consider before hosting such get-togethers, including any food allergies their guests may have.

Entertaining guests who have food allergies makes menu decisions more difficult. According to estimates from the nonprofit organization Food Allergy Research and Education, 15 million American adults have food allergies. In addition, a 2013 study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that food allergies among children increased approximately 50 percent between 1997 and 2011.

Because food allergies are so prevalent, it's important that party hosts take steps to keep their guests happy and healthy.

• *Ask guests if they have food al-*

lergies. Encourage guests to discuss their food concerns with you before you plan the menu. While some guests may be hesitant to share such information, assure them that their comfort is your biggest priority. Keep a log of guests' food allergies that you can refer to when planning the menu, and use this log when planning future parties.

• *Prepare food safely.* When preparing meals, take steps to avoid cross-contamination of allergy-inducing foods. Use different dishes, spoons and utensils when preparing meals. In addition, prior to preparing food, thoroughly clean all dishes you plan to use in an effort to remove any traces of allergens from past meals.

• *Read all labels.* Just because a food seems safe doesn't mean that it is. Read packaging and labels carefully to determine if the product contains any allergens or if it was produced in factories where it might have been subjected to cross-contamination.

• *Keep allergy-safe foods separate.* Allow guests with food allergies to dig in prior to others so that serving utensils do not transfer allergens to other serving dishes. Place safe foods away from those that may trigger allergic reactions and label items carefully if you are serving buffet style meals.

• *Research allergy-free recipes.* Look for recipes that do not include many of the most common allergens, such as nuts, soy, dairy, and eggs.

• *Express your concerns.* If you are worried that you may inadvertently introduce an allergen into the foods you plan to serve, speak to your guests in advance of the party. Guests will likely be willing to bring dishes they prepare themselves to calm your nerves and ensure they don't suffer an allergic reaction.

Food allergies can be challenging waters to navigate. But maintaining an open dialogue with your guests about food allergies can ensure your next dinner party is a success.



Instead of serving them on the same platter as all foods, keep foods that are known to trigger food allergies separate so guests can rest easier.

SOUP -n- SUCH BISTRO

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Dress up drab desserts

Decadent desserts are often the culmination of family meals or meaningful social occasions. Dessert signals the end of special events and lets guests know it is now acceptable for them to plan their exits.

Party hosts should not feel pressured to bake or create elaborate desserts. Some guests may even bring their own homemade desserts as tokens of appreciation to offer their hosts. However, for those who want to ensure there is dessert available in the event

company does not bring a cake or box of cookies, the following are some ways to dress up store-bought treats to make them look like impressive desserts.

• **Gourmet ice-cream sandwiches:** Purchase ready-made cookies in your favorite varieties as well as a flavor of ice cream that coordinates with the cookies (chocolate and mint works well). Allow the ice cream to soften slightly, then spoon a bit onto one cookie and sandwich the ice cream with another

cookie. Place the sandwiches back into the freezer to harden and set before serving.

• **Decadent drizzle:** Any dessert can look like a professionally concocted confection with a creative display. Drizzle

chocolate or raspberry syrup on the plate before placing your slice of cake or pastry. Top with a dusting of confectioner's sugar.

• **Shaved chocolate:** Turn an ordinary brownie or sundae into something stunning with shaved chocolate. Run a vegetable peeler along the side of a favorite bar of chocolate to create a garnish.

• **Warmed up:** Heat any store-bought pie before serving and top with fresh whipped cream. Your guests will swear it's homemade.



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