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10 Acts of Kindness- Supporting your friends, family, and co-workers with food allergy or food intolerance

When you have a food allergy or food intolerance you have to think about every morsel of food and every sip of a drink that you put in your mouth.

Although, avoiding the food(s) you need to is a part of your everyday life, it is **really great** when your friends, family, or co-workers do something nice to make it easier for you to get along in the world with your food restrictions. I want to list some of the acts of kindness that stand out from over the years. I will not focus on family or my husband who has supported me from day 1 (almost 20 years ago), he is the best! We have a peanut free home and we do not eat in any high-risk restaurants. Now that I was recently found to be gluten intolerant, he is joining me in this new adventure and we are adapting how we cook and eat out. I am sure I am missing a few acts of kindness and I apologize in advance to anyone that I have not included.

If you want to help support a friend, family member, or co-worker with food allergy or food intolerance think about these examples and consider surprising them with an act of kindness when they least expect it. It is helpful to know what you can't eat, but it is even more supportive to provide safe food options when possible.

If you are not sure how to support your friend, family member, or co-worker with food allergy or food intolerance just ask them!

10 Acts of Food Allergy and Food Intolerance Kindness

1. Sending/giving A Food Allergy/Intolerance Product

I am always on the search for new products that are safe to eat.

It is great when friends are also thinking of you and send you a safe food product. Two instances that stand out are when I received surprises in the mail from friends. One instance was receiving Seth Ellis, Sun Cups (www.suncups.com) that are peanut free from my friend Janet in Colorado and the other was receiving fancy pants cookies (www.fancypantsbakery.com) that are peanut free from my friend April in Maryland. It is always so nice to be thought of!



2. Checking With Caterers For A Wedding or Special Event

I have a good friend Jenn who is also a Registered Dietitian and has twin sisters. Everyone in her family knows I have a peanut allergy. I attended each of her sister's weddings. For each wedding my friend Jenn's mother, Nancy, checked with the caterers and bakery to make sure that the food served, including the dessert, would be peanut free and safe for me to eat. I have been to many weddings and often left hungry as there were not many safe food options. It felt amazing to have someone else make sure that you will have a safe eating experience as a guest and it is not even your special occasion. I will always remember

these amazing acts of kindness.

3. Providing Safe Foods for Work Celebrations

Since I am much better at communicating my peanut allergy at work my direct co-workers know I have a food allergy. Often at various times food is brought in, much of which I cannot eat. At my current job with the Nutrition Sciences Department at Drexel University (www.drexel.edu/nutrition/) there was a birthday celebration this fall during a department meeting for several of us with recent birthdays. Our Director, bought a beautiful fresh fruit platter since I have a peanut allergy knowing that most baked goods would not be safe. This was so appreciated that I was able to enjoy the food for this celebration.

4. Putting Unsafe Food Away When Hosting a Person with A Food Allergy/Intolerance

This one goes out to my nephews. I have two amazing nephews, Andrew and Reece. They love peanut butter. Every time I come to visit, they tell their mom (my sister) to hide the peanut butter because Aunt Lori is coming. I think it is sweet that they want to protect me and are willing to give up a food they like for a few days!

5. Bringing Safe Foods To Social Gatherings

I have many instances of this that come to mind. It is so appreciated when friends, family, and co-workers choose a recipe or product(s) to bring to a social gathering that you can eat. Recently, this summer a friend of ours brought cupcakes to our Fourth of July party. She made one batch that I couldn't eat, but another batch that was made safely and especially for me. I will bring safe food to share myself when going to social gatherings, but it is great when your options are expanded and you are specifically thought of.

6. Helping to Plan Ahead When Eating Out

Most of the time when planning ahead before eating out, I am responsible for checking if the restaurant can accommodate my peanut allergy. It is very helpful when friends, family members, or co-workers take the lead to check if the restaurant where the group is going to eat out is a safe option before the plans are set in stone.

A group of my lifelong friends and I are planning to go out to eat next weekend as part of a birthday celebration in my hometown, Annapolis, Maryland. My friend Wendy asked the restaurant manager if they can accommodate my dietary restrictions ahead of time which really makes me feel special and lessens the stress of eating out with restrictions.

7. Giving A Food Gift That Is Safe

I can't tell you how many food gifts I have received over the years that I cannot eat. For some of the gifts the giver wouldn't have known about my food allergy. Others gifts were from people who knew about my food allergy but did not check if the item was safe for me to eat.

This past Christmas a neighbor made us homemade chocolate covered pretzels and before she gave them to us she asked if I could eat them, as she knew I had some sort of food allergy. I asked her what brands she used and found out that both the pretzels (Synder's) and the chocolate were unsafe. The next day, my neighbor calls to tell me she made me my own special batch of chocolate covered pretzels with Glutino (www.glutino.com/) pretzels and enjoy life foods (www.enjoylifefoods.com) chocolate. This was an amazing act of kindness that was not necessary, but much appreciated and thoroughly enjoyed!

8. Asking If A Food is Safe When Eating Away From Home For Your Friend, Family Member, or Co-worker

A few years back we were at a wedding in Lancaster, PA for friend's of ours who have families with Amish and Mennonite backgrounds. The food was amazing and the wedding "cake" was homemade pies. A friend of ours who is a nurse went up to the family members that made the pies to check if they were safe for me to eat before I had asked. This was so sweet of her to check for me. These pies were homemade, delicious, and safe which is a rarity!

9. Keeping Food Labels To Check For Safety

Eating away from home poses the biggest risk to those with food allergies and intolerances. When friends, family members, and co-workers save food labels for foods they made or are serving it is very helpful so I can check the labels for any items that I am unsure of. This provides an extra layer of protection and I really appreciate it! Over the holidays, we were at a friend's house for dinner and they saved the food labels for me to double check before eating. This makes for a very enjoyable and relaxing get together!



10. Giving A Gift Card to A Food Allergy/Intolerance Company

I recently received a thank you gift card to one of my favorite places Sweet Freedom Bakery (www.sweetfreedombakery.com) in Philadelphia, PA from someone whom I completed a recommendation letter for. This was the *first and only* gift card I have ever received to a company that sells products geared for food allergy or intolerance. Now that I think of it I can't believe it, the first one. This act of kindness made more than just my day. Food allergy and intolerance specialty products are often more expensive than other products. Especially, as I sit here and enjoy my tasty but expensive (compared to gluten containing) gluten free soft pretzel from Tonya's Gluten Free Pretzels (www.tonyasglutenfree.com). Giving a gift card to a company or store that sells products for those with food allergies and intolerances is sure to be a hit and remembered!

