

To Buffet or Not To Buffet? That is the question.

When I think of a buffet many things come to mind including the following:

Is that an *unsafe* food that fell into the salad dressing that I wanted to use?

Did the food service worker actually *touch the nuts* with her hands or just shake the nuts into the container; could another item have nuts on it by *cross contamination*?

How *long* has the food been on the buffet?

What are the *actual ingredients* in the food item?

How was the food prepared in the back of the house (restaurant)?

Have the *serving utensils* only been in the food item it was meant for?

Did that person really just *sneeze* on the spread?

Do you really need to have "*bulk*" *peanut butter on this buffet*, why couldn't you have individual packages?

Should I really eat this?

Man that looks good *I wish I could eat it*.



Healthcare professionals including myself who work in food allergy will instruct their clients/patients to AVOID BUFFETS as they are high risk for cross contamination. The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network recommends this as well, www.foodallergy.org/page/dining-away-from-home-with-food-allergy.

I am often asked if I can eat at a buffet and if I have.

To Buffet or Not To Buffet?

I will be honest and I have eaten at buffets before, but 99% of the time I will not eat at a buffet it is just too high risk. Family and friends know this and the majority of the time this will not be an option for any of our plans for eating out. The few times I have eaten at a buffet lots of planning and precautions took place to ensure it would be a safe eating experience. I caution those with food allergy or intolerance to eat at your own risk at a buffet. I always avoid Asian and Asian influenced buffets due to high peanut content. I will highlight a few of my buffet experiences and why they were successful. In no particular order.

1. Disney World, Orlando, Florida and Disney Dream Cruise Ship

disneyparks.disney.go.com/

disneycruise.disney.go.com/ships-activities/ships/dream

Disney is a great place to go for those with food allergies and intolerances. I have been to Disney World multiple times and many buffets with family and friends. What makes this successful is that I alert my server when I arrive and the Chef comes out to review the buffet items with me in person. If there are any specific concerns the Chefs offer to make something just for me that is safe. This makes me feel special and safe! Over the holidays we went on a multi family cruise on the Disney Dream. The entire staff was very helpful in providing me with safe food options. Often, it was more convenient with small children to eat at the buffet versus a longer sit down meal and I was able to have many safe options. I got to know the buffet Executive Chef well and ate some foods from the buffet and had a few especially made for me!

Key: Restaurant/Organization that takes Food Allergy/Intolerances Seriously, Communicate with

Staff, Make Smart Choices

2. Pusser's, Thanksgiving Buffet, Annapolis, MD

pusserusa.com/locations/annapolis-restaurant

Only a week after an anaphylactic reaction from eating out, I was scheduled to go to a Thanksgiving Buffet near my hometown with many family members. My mom had called in advance and spoken with the manager to see if they could accommodate my peanut allergy. The manager told my mom that it would not be a problem and to let them know when I arrived and that they would be ready for me! After, my recent reaction I was hesitant and very skeptical. When I arrived, at the hostess stand there was a buffet menu with my name on it and it had circled all of the items that I could safely eat and items to stay away from. Then, when our server came to our table I identified myself and they got the Chef. The Chef took me around to the buffet stations and showed me which items were safe and which were not. We had a discussion about the options and he was very helpful. I was able to successfully navigate this holiday buffet! Shortly, after this amazing experience I contacted the leadership of the hotel and restaurant to let them know about this positive experience. It was then I learned that one of the leaders of the hotel has a son with a peanut allergy and they often eat at the restaurant. The restaurant staff had extra training regarding food allergies and intolerances and it showed in their service!

Key: Restaurant/Organization that takes Food Allergy/Intolerances Seriously, Plan Ahead, Communicate with Staff, Make Smart Choices

3. Heron's At The Umstead, Thanksgiving Buffet, Cary, NC

www.theumstead.com

Surprise, another Thanksgiving Buffet. My family likes to get together for Thanksgiving, but many of us come together from all over so often it is arranged to eat out. My sister recently moved to Cary, NC with her family. So, this past Thanksgiving we traveled to Cary, NC and met up with my Aunt, Uncle, and cousins and a cousin's boyfriend. There were not a lot of places to pick from that could accommodate our time and large group, but my Aunt found Heron's which is an upscale restaurant. She alerted them ahead of time and when we got to our table I let our server know about my allergy. The Chef came out and again reviewed the buffet with me as to what I could eat and what I should stay away from. All of the food looked amazing and much of it was local and organic. The desserts looked like delicious works of art, but they were not safe from nuts or cross contamination. I had many choices on the buffet but there were areas I needed to stay away from including, breads, baked goods, and desserts. I have to say it was hard to see everyone else eating the amazing looking desserts when I could not, but I have to make smart choices or it could be deadly.

Key: Restaurant/Organization that takes Food Allergy/Intolerances Seriously, Communicate with Staff, Make Smart Choices

4. Concordville Inn Restaurant, Brunch Buffet, Concordville, PA

www.concordville.com

There are several brunch places near my house and the Concordville Inn Restaurant has a great one! I have been there many times as it is very popular with family and friends as well as for holidays. Each time I check with the staff to see if any ingredients have changed before making my selections. Sometimes the buffet is in a ballroom and other time in their dining room depending on if it is a holiday or busy occasion. Either way, they generally separate the food choices by stations. They have an omelet station which is peanut and nut free and many other options. I avoid the dessert bar and chocolate fountain and instead have fresh fruit with a little whip cream! Sometimes, they offer a packaged pastry that is safe for me to eat and if it is there I may

choose it just because I can. Other safe options include antipasto offerings, vegetables, and some warm foods. I have had many enjoyable brunches at the Concordville Inn.

Key: Separate Food Stations, Communicate with Staff, Make Smart Choices

5. FAAN Conference Buffets, numerous, various locations

www.foodallergy.org/section/food-allergy-conferences11

The Food Allergy & Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN) practices what it preaches! I have been to at least five FAAN conferences over the years. Each time the lunch buffet has “food name tags” which lists all ingredient so that those attending the conferences who have food allergy can review the information and make safe choices. This makes for a great eating experience. FAAN works behind the scenes before the conferences to ensure that there will be safe choices and detailed information about the foods served. Every time I have been to a FAAN conference there have been multiple peanut free desserts and I just have to indulge as this is a rarity!

Key: Restaurant/Organization that takes Food Allergy/Intolerances Seriously, Read Ingredients Carefully, Make Smart Choices

So inquire, plan ahead, communicate, and then think hard..... To Buffet or Not To Buffet?

Always have your emergency medications and plan!

