

## health check

# NONE FOR ME, THANKS

Food allergies and intolerances are no joke. Neither is catering for someone who has one



It's like the beginning of a bad joke: a coeliac sufferer, a lactose-intolerant and a guy with a nut allergy walk into a dinner party... Fortunately, Johannesburg dietitian and spokesperson for ADSA (Association for Dietetics in South Africa) Lerato Radebe is here to make sure we all come out laughing.

### GLUTINOUS MAXIMUS

Gluten intolerance is a condition that causes difficulty in digesting gluten (a protein found in wheat, barley and rye). The degree of intolerance varies, so some sufferers can eat very small quantities. The more serious coeliac disease is an autoimmune disorder in which the body mistakes gluten for a threat. It launches an immune response, which can harm the intestines. Coeliac sufferers must avoid gluten altogether. Offer an alternative such as maize or

rice and watch out for hidden gluten – it's used in anything from soya sauce to ready-made soups.

### MILKING IT

Lactose intolerance is caused when the small intestine does not produce enough of the enzyme lactase, which is required to digest milk. This creates digestive discomfort in sufferers when they consume dairy products. Some people will better tolerate fermented products such as yoghurt and cheese, but rather avoid dairy altogether.

## ALLERGY OR INTOLERANCE?

**An allergy** is the body's immune response to a particular food, which triggers symptoms ranging from vomiting and diarrhoea to rashes, swelling or hives. Allergies can be confirmed by a blood test.

**An intolerance** (which is usually less severe) is a digestive reaction that may cause nausea, vomiting, heartburn, diarrhoea or constipation.



## AN OBLIGING HOST

It is up to the individual to mention any dietary requirements, but a good host should ask in advance about any allergies. Point out dishes containing problem ingredients, especially those where they're not obviously visible. Avoid cross-contamination by using clean utensils for different foods.

### GOING NUTS

Tree nuts (such as almonds or cashews) and peanuts (which are really legumes) are both common allergens – so much so that many food products will contain a warning if they have been produced or packaged in a factory that uses nuts. Leave all nuts off the menu if you know a guest has an allergy.

in Chinese and Thai foods, and even some brands of Worcestershire sauce (which also may contain anchovies).

### ALL CHOKED UP

Anaphylaxis is a very severe allergic response that causes swelling in the areas exposed to the allergen (usually the mouth, lips and throat). If the throat is swollen, the lungs can't take in air and oxygen can't reach the brain. Allergens can also trigger the release of chemicals that might cause low blood pressure, heart attack and death.

### SHELL SHOCK

Shellfish, cephalopods (calamari and octopus) and fish can also cause serious allergic reactions in some people. Steer clear of mixed seafood dishes such as paella and fish curry, so there is no confusion. And look out for ingredients such as the oyster and fish sauces used

### WHEN TO WORRY

If a guest battles to breathe or shows any other sign of an allergic reaction, call an ambulance right away. **MX**

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