Eating out guide

Eating out with HFI can be very of difficult.

If we are asked out to friends for a meal, most of us have at some point felt obliged to eat food that is unsafe. That is the time to open a discussion with your friends as to what you can or cannot eat. Still expect the food to be "challenging" because people just do not "get it".

An awful lot of restaurants and hospitality settings have foods which are prepared using ingredients that can cause symptoms for someone with HFI.

Always check the menu with a restaurant or eating establishment beforehand to avoid the disappointment of either not being able to eat anything on offer, or of eating something that isn't 100% safe for HFI, and then feel really ill as a result. Most restaurants will cook you plain fish or meat or even egg and chips, if you ask them. An understanding restaurant may make you plain pasta with olive oil or butter and prawns/ fish/olives. Some restaurants will have the ingredients needed to make a HFI safe meal, whereas others (particularly hotels) will just have preprepared foods that only have to be microwaved or grilled, so have no control over ingredients.

Ideally, check the menu of somewhere that you're interested in going to, beforehand. Most chefs and eatery staff will never have heard of HFI. As fructose or sugar are not allergens and are not generally recognised as causing intolerance, there is no foods standards procedure for listing them. So if an establishment offers to show you the intolerance/allergy list, it will tell you nothing of use for safe HFI eating.

It is always better to ask for an ingredients list. Some cafes and restaurants are much better than others at checking for you. Also, let them know that your fructose, sucrose and sorbitol diet is not a personal preference but rather is a medical necessity. Show them your Medical or Rare Disease Alert card, if you have one.

From experience we have found that establishments vary tremendously. Catering venues that we would expect to understand and provide safe food e.g. The Royal Society of Medicine, where our request for a fructose, sucrose and sorbitol free diet was dismissed with "We don't cater for personal preference". Then small village pubs, where a chef has looked at every ingredients list – even bringing frozen packets of food for us to check for ourselves, and refusing to serve sausages because there was sugar listed on the packet ingredients list!

Things like burgers used to be safer than they are now. It is now common to find that they have onion or onion powder in them. Even 'snack' foods bought out can be unsafe. Sausages and sausagemeat will often contain onion, onion powder or even sugar.

Once someone with HFI has found a safe food in a cafe or restaurant, it's likely that they'll always order the same food on each visit. We tend to stick with what we know to be safe, and will often be found ordering fish and chips or steak and chips. For those of you who don't have HFI but have a family member who does, please don't be concerned that they are always eating the same foods! That's perfectly normal for HFI!

Assuming that you've checked the ingredients lists and found safe foods, please be aware of checking things like sauces, dressings and mayonnaise. We've probably all been caught out by forgetting to ask for a dressing to be served separately so we can check taste first, then finding our safe salad leaves covered in a dressing with added honey or balsamic vinegar. It's safer to avoid dressings and sauces completely – definitely for children – and for adults with HFI, do ask for dressing or sauce to be served separately so you can taste test first. Most adults with HFI have developed a very acute sense of taste for sweetened foods, which is a learnt response from feeling ill after eating sweet foods – usually well before diagnosis.

As we've already said, a safe choice will almost always be steak and chips or fish and chips. Herb butters can be safe. Most chips are safe, but as always, do check! Skin on fries cause gut pain for some with HFI.

In Chinese restaurants and takeaways, as food is cooked to order, you can ask for "No added sugar". You can also ask for things like "No peas" or "No onion". Most people with HFI will stick with dishes like chicken or shrimp foo yung, fried rice, sometimes sweet and sour chicken or prawn balls, but *not* with sweet and sour sauce– and *always* check with the seller what ingredients are in everything, including batters.

For an Italian restaurant and takeaway, a safe meal is *usually* a spaghetti carbonara or other food in a cream based sauce. Pizza with a white or cheese sauce base is ok as long as the pizza dough and any toppings are sugar free. Again, always check ingredients first.

In an Indian restaurant and takeaway, we're generally ok with a tandoori grill – not in a sauce, and plain rice. Some venues do a safe daal, but not all. As always, check ingredients.

Turkish kebabs are usually safe, as is quite a lot of Greek food, such as souvlaki. Always check ingredients.

KFC chicken is ok (at time of writing) but avoid their chips.

Generally we suggest avoiding McDonalds, KFC chips, Subway, most American Diners but again, do check as ingredients often change. Most burgers in the UK are served in a brioche bun, which is sweet and unsafe. Let us know if you find somewhere with sugar free food!

If you do find helpful venues with safe food, please thank them, maybe write a good review for them and consider telling others with HFI about your good service on our social media pages or our WhatsApp support group.