

## **PENNY SAVER NEWS**

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### Holiday Guests with Special Needs?

Even if you 'just have family over' for the holidays, you're more likely than ever to have at least one guest who needs some kind of special diet. That means you, the hostess-with-the-mostest, suddenly has to figure out what to make that has no gluten, no milk, soy, or none of something else. What are you to do? Will you just tell your guests they have to bring their own food? That might seem easier, but it doesn't feel very welcoming.

There are ways to handle food allergies that don't require completely scrapping your menu. Start by contacting the person with the allergies and asking them. Find out what it is that they need to avoid. Is it a complete NO, or will they still be safe if their problem food is still in the same kitchen or on the same utensils? Also ask if there are particularly good substitutions that they have found. If you've taken the time to ask, they'll probably be more than happy to share their cooking tips with you.

It's also good to find out how sensitive they are to the ingredient. If they can't have gluten, then having bread on the table won't hurt them. As long as they don't eat it, they won't be affected. But if they are severely sensitive to shrimp, then using the same oil to fry shrimp and then chicken could make the chicken off limits to them too. Don't just assume, ask them!

Some people can not drink milk without suffering afterwards. But many people who are lactose intolerant will be able to handle a little milk in the gravy, especially when it is part of a larger meal. They will often also not have problems if there is milk or a milk ingredient in the dinner rolls or casserole. But don't assume, ask them!

Once you're clear on how strict they need to be for their health, take a look at the menu you had in mind. Often there will be at least one or two things that you won't even need to modify. And often there will be some things that can easily be modified. You can use soy milk instead of dairy for the scalloped potatoes. Or substitute pumpkin seeds for walnuts. If you want more help there are many websites with recipes designed for cooking with allergies. Start by checking under Food Allergy Network, or search for the particular food you need to avoid.

Then head for the store with your list ready. Be ready to take some extra time to read labels

for ingredients. Look at both the list of ingredients and at the end of the list. What you need to avoid might be in either place. For example, a list might say "...casein (milk), lecithin (soy)..." or at the end of the whole list it might say "Contains milk and soy." Either way, if you need to avoid soy or milk, you can't have that product.

As you shop, put your special purchases on one side of the cart. Ask they they be bagged separately. And while they are super convenient this season, skip the deli counters and salad bars. There are places where foods can be mixed and contaminated just too easily.

When you get home, put them in a separate area. This way you'll avoid mixing ingredients by accident. Keep them labeled now. Prepare them first, before the risky ingredients come out of the cupboard. When you serve them, use separate utensils. Then take the plate directly to the person who needs it. The better you plan, the fewer mistakes there will be, and the more delighted your guests will be.

There are plenty of gluten-free mixes on the market. Add a plate of gluten-free brownies to the dessert table along with the custard pie. Bake one pan of gluten-free rolls and one of your regular. Just be sure to keep them separate, and clearly labeled. While you're at it, make some gluten-free cornbread for dressing too. With the quality of the gluten-free products now, there's no need to feel bad that you used a mix.

Here's a super quick soup to warm your family. With fresh local tomatoes coming soon and Mexican seasoning for added flavor, it will be a big hit. A dollop of plain Greek yogurt, a few more diced tomatoes, a sprig of fresh cilantro, or even a slice or two of radish will add some holiday color.

#### Winter Gazpacho Olé

1 ½ lb fully ripe fresh tomatoes (3 large)	1 Tbsp vegetable oil
1 ½ tsp ground cumin	1 cup chopped green sweet pepper
½ cup sliced scallions or green onions	1 can black beans, drained, rinsed
4 cups mild picante-flavor vegetable juice	¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro leaves

Wash, core and chop tomatoes (about 4 cups). Heat oil in saucepan, stir in cumin. Stir and cook 30 seconds until fragrant. Stir in tomatoes, peppers and scallions. Cook 3-5 minutes until pepper is tender-crisp, stirring occasionally. Add juice, beans, cilantro and salt to taste. Heat 3-5 minutes until heated through. Garnish with plain Greek yogurt if desired when serving. Serves 6.

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