

Helping you stay well

Food Allergy and Intolerances

Information for you, your family, friends, & carers

If you suspect you have a food allergy or intolerance, it is important to seek advice from your GP and be referred to a registered dietitian if appropriate.

Excluding certain foods unnecessarily could mean you are missing out on essential nutrients that you need to stay well, so you should obtain advice from a health professional to make sure that you avoid the right foods for you.

Can I still have the HILS' meal service if I am allergic to some foods?

Yes: we can provide information about allergens for all our foods and drinks. However, our meal recipes may change and, whilst we do our best to keep our clients updated about recipe changes, it is important that you always check the ingredients listed on the packaging of the meals.



You will see allergens are clearly marked in **bold** on the ingredients listed on our meals. Food manufacturers are required to list these allergens by law. If you have a food allergy, please contact your local Support Team who can advise you on suitable meal choices.



Helping you stay well



Hertfordshire Independent Living Service Supporting your independence

The 14 most common allergens are:

- Celery
- Cereals containing gluten
e.g. wheat, rye, and barley
- Eggs
- Fish
- Lupin
- Milk
- Mustard
- Nuts
- Peanuts
- Sesame seeds
- Soya
- Sulphites
e.g. prawns, crab and lobster
- Crustaceans
e.g. prawns, crab and lobster
- Molluscs
e.g. mussels and oysters



Do HILS' meals contain nuts?

Our main meal supplier, apetito, no longer uses peanuts or tree nuts as an ingredient in any of the foods that they prepare. However, like most food manufacturers, they cannot guarantee that their products will be 100% free from nuts or nut derivatives, as ingredients may have come into contact with nuts at some point in the food chain. Therefore apetito has decided not to label their foods as 'nut free'.



This policy does not apply to foods which are not actually 'nuts' such as chestnut, pine nut or coconut as these are in fact seeds.

What is the difference between a food allergy and an intolerance?

An allergic reaction happens when the body's immune system wrongly thinks that a food protein is harmful and tries to defend against it, causing symptoms such as an itchy rash, swelling, vomiting, and diarrhoea.

Symptoms can be immediate (within two hours of eating the food), and in severe cases an allergic reaction can cause anaphylaxis: a life threatening condition that requires immediate medical attention.

A food intolerance is not the same as a food allergy. Food intolerances may cause symptoms such as diarrhoea, bloating, and stomach cramps. This may be due to difficulties digesting certain substances, such as lactose, which is found in dairy products. Whilst a food intolerance is not life threatening, it can still have an impact on quality of life.

How should I manage my food intolerance?

The symptoms of a food intolerance usually occur several hours after eating the food. Symptoms vary between individuals: where some people can only cope with small amounts of the food, others may be able to have more, so it is important to work out how much you can eat rather than exclude it completely.

For example, some people who are lactose intolerant may need to avoid milky foods like yoghurt and custard, but they may be able to manage smaller amounts, such as a little milk in a cup of tea.

If you are intolerant to certain foods, then please contact your local Support Team who can advise you on suitable meal choices.

Digestive symptoms and bowel health

Some people find certain foods difficult to digest, or that they may exacerbate an existing condition such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). We have information booklets on bowel health and managing IBS, please call us to request a copy.

Food allergy testing

An allergy diagnosis can only be made by a trained health professional. Be extremely wary of alternative tests that claim to diagnose food allergies or intolerances. Contact the HILS' nutrition team for an information sheet on allergy testing.

"Alternative allergy testing should be avoided as it has no scientific basis"

– British Dietetic Association



I have been told I should avoid gluten, what does this mean?

If your GP or dietitian has advised you to avoid gluten, **we have a variety of gluten-free main courses and desserts for you to choose from.**

These are marked GF on our menu. If you have been diagnosed with coeliac disease, we also have a booklet available. Please call the HILS' Support Team to request a copy.

Food preferences

We all have our likes and dislikes when it comes to food and drink.

If there are certain foods you would rather avoid, please let your local Support Team know.



Useful links:

For more information on food allergy and intolerances, visit Allergy UK's website: **www.allergyuk.org**

For a factsheet on allergies, visit the British Dietetic Association's website: **www.bda.uk.com**

We also have a selection of additional booklets and leaflets for the following health conditions:

Diabetes, caring for someone with dementia, chewing and swallowing, feeling forgetful, Heart Health, good bowel health, coeliac disease, kidney problems, IBS, COPD, food labelling.

This resource has been compiled using available current evidence and has been approved by a team of dietitians and nutritionists.

The information is for general use and should not replace individual tailored advice given by a healthcare professional.

For further information, please contact your local Support Team or visit our website on **www.hertsindependentliving.org** or contact us directly through **nutrition@hertsindependentliving.org** Alternatively, please call Hertfordshire Independent Living Service on **0330 2000 103** (all calls charged at local rate)