

My name is Jenna Nelson, I am a 29 year old living in Melbourne with an allergy to nuts.

I was diagnosed at age 12 after an exposure to hazelnuts and cashews at Christmas. Back then, the knowledge and awareness around anaphylaxis and allergies was nowhere near as good as it is now.

I mentioned a day later to my mother that I felt tingling and swelling to my face and lips, as well as becoming itchy after eating a chocolate. This prompted her to book me into the local GP who sent me for a RAST test at the pathology clinic. Results confirmed that I had a severe allergy to cashews and hazelnuts and subsequently a referral was made to an allergist and I was prescribed an EpiPen. Back in those days, they weren't fully subsidised on the PBS so cost over \$100 every 6-12 months.

The allergist I was referred to had a several month wait and was one of two available to see in Melbourne. \$350 later and several skin pricks revealed an allergy to several varieties nuts.

During my teenage years, I had only one reaction to a focaccia, which I incorrectly ordered. However, in the past six months alone I have had three mild reactions not requiring hospital treatment.

First reaction was to a meatball roll purchased from a hospital café in Melbourne. I questioned the ingredients prior to purchasing and was told the meatballs were made offsite so their ingredients were unknown. I made the decision to proceed with my choice and ate the roll, however soon after developed nausea, abdominal pain and throat discomfort.

The second reaction was to a burger from a takeaway restaurant. I was not present during the order but my partner was unaware that there was any nuts in it. Again, similar reaction soon after consuming it. I sent a message to the restaurant via Facebook as they did not have a phone number listed on their website and the restaurant told me that the burger had a "secret sauce" and could not provide me with the exact ingredients but could confirm it had nuts. The third reaction was to a meal I had previously eaten at a café and had added pesto to the meal without updating the signage.

In recent years, I have travelled overseas several times and have found their food handling and provision of food to be more thorough and reassuring for consumers with food allergies. I have been offered meals prepared in separate areas of kitchens and modifications to meals, which food services in Australia seem unwilling to even attempt. I actually feel safer eating out in a foreign country with limited English than I do eating out in Australia.

For Mother's Day this year, I booked a lunch at a renowned restaurant at Crown in Melbourne. Upon completing the order, I asked the wait staff if any of the dishes I had ordered contained nuts. The wait staff informed me all dishes on their menu are cooked in peanut oil. I informed them I had an allergy and could a substitute be made. The manager of the restaurant came and spoke with us, informing me that no – this wasn't an option, she didn't feel comfortable with me eating at the restaurant, she didn't want me to "die on her" and offered a meal from a menu at a nearby restaurant. I was mortified and upset that this kind of hospitality was being offered to me, I felt I was a burden and decided to leave and eat elsewhere.

In my experience, I find that menus are always highlighting the Vegan, Vegetarian or Gluten Free options, all of which are not life threatening, however people with allergies are unable to make completely informed decisions when eating out, creating unnecessary stress and anxiety before even eating a meal. Something needs to change before it becomes too difficult to enjoy a simple meal out with friends or family.