



Western Hospitality Services

# Working towards meeting the dietary need of all students.

Submitted by Anne Zok, Western University

Meeting the dietary needs of today's students can be a daunting task -- one that challenges us to provide 'allergen- friendly' foods, gluten-free foods and foods that meet the needs of our international/exchange students. I think perhaps this can be accomplished, albeit attention to detail, strong marketing strategies and continuous follow-up are key.

The process: Over the years, Residence Dining at Western has safely accommodated countless students with food allergies and/or intolerances. An extensive six-week residence menu rotation, which can be viewed online, ensures that all students have their nutritional needs met. For students with severe allergies, it is strongly recommended that they introduce themselves to the Unit Manager in their residence. For the first few weeks in September, it is imperative that the student work closely with our Residence Dining staff. They have been trained in safe food handling and know the importance of food safety in the prevention of cross-contamination as well as the possible complications that can arise when a food allergen is consumed by a person with an allergy. However, for students with severe allergies, it is strongly recommended that they contact the Nutrition Manager prior to their arrival in September. Meeting times can be scheduled with the Nutrition Manager over the summer in an effort to become familiar with the food allergy accommodation policies. Meetings can also be scheduled for move-in weekend with students, parents, and key leaders within the residence operation. Lastly, Western recommends that all students with food allergies/intolerances complete a Food Allergy Emergency

Plan Form. Once completed and returned to us, this form is posted in the kitchen area, out of public view. We have found the Food Allergy Emergency Plan Form to be a very effective communication tool enabling our staff to more effectively meet the special dietary needs of our varied students.

The food: In an effort to meet the diverse dietary needs of our students, a creative, varied menu is key. Meals that are prepared with foods subjected to the least amount of processing are much more apt to meet these needs. Examples include (but are not limited to): unprocessed (not marinated) meats/fish, canned or dry legumes, fresh fruits and vegetables, non-dairy milk, and other major staples that are free of additives containing the 8 most common allergens (milk, eggs, shellfish, fish, tree nuts, peanuts, wheat and soy). It's really about getting back to the basics. The more 'natural' menu selections are, the easier it is for students to identify those foods which are safe for them to consume.

Marketing/Communications: All effort towards creating an allergen-friendly environment for our students can be lost if not communicated effectively. Proper staff training, point of purchase and on-line marketing as well as strong lines of communication between foodservice personal and students are all key to ensuring students have, at their disposal, safe and healthy food options. The diversity of our student population continues to grow and with that we will continue to see an increase in special dietary needs. However, students also need to be made aware of their responsibilities. The onus is still on them to come forward, familiarize themselves with organizational allergy policies and work with the foodservice provider to ensure their own personal safety. With the due diligence of both parties, students can safely enjoy university life.

