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Eating Out

I would like to share an incident which happened to us and highlights how vigilant you have to be if you have a child at risk of anaphylaxis. My older son Cameron is 6 years old and allergic to peanuts and tree nuts. (My younger son is 3 and to date not allergic!)

In May 2011 we had dinner at a nearby hotel restaurant where they make and bake their own pizzas. We ordered my boys' favourite kids' meals- a plate of fish and chips and a ham and cheese pizza for them to share. I did not feel the need to again ask if the meals were nut free because we had been to this restaurant often and knew from before the boys' favourite meals did not contain any nuts.

When the kids' meals arrived, I diligently cut up the pizza and portioned the fish and chips for the children. Imagine our shock when Cameron held up a cashew nut from his plate and promptly asked, "What's this?" Cameron picked up the cashew nut probably more by sheer surprise than by curiosity that a cashew nut (which he had already recognised) was sitting on his pizza and then threw it down on the plate once he saw the look of horror written all over my face!

Cameron knew he had to get to the bathroom to wash his hands and my husband accompanied him to wash them a second time. The cashew nut was on his pizza and despite my looking and cutting up both meals on the plates I failed to see it.

I spoke to the waitress who had served us the boys' meals and explained why we couldn't have the meals because of Cameron's nut allergy. She understood the consequences of what could have happened if Cameron had not alerted us to the cashew nut. The kids' meals were taken away with apologies and the kitchen staff were informed of the incident. Two new plates of fish and chips and ham and cheese pizza were made with assurances that they were nut free.

The pizza hand in the kitchen had obviously been preparing an Indian gourmet pizza which contained cashew nuts at the same time he prepared our kids' pizza. They were possibly baked in the pizza oven together. I wonder whether saying something about Cameron's allergy would have meant more care was taken with food preparation and maybe even the baking of his food.

Although 5 months have passed I still think of the incident with a shudder of what could have happened. Cameron later remarked that he was surprised that the texture of the cashew nut was hard but gave slightly between his finger and thumb. The "good" that has come from this is that Cameron remembers the episode well and alarm bells go off when he eats in an environment away from home (school, vacation care and after school hours etc). He also knows that even if I am there, he is old enough to double check now too!



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I feel much credit goes to my son for recognising a cashew nut. It stems from many times we have spent identifying various nuts in supermarkets where they have them on display. Both my sons were not put off over the incident which was what my husband and I wished for. We want to continue to go out for dinner, an enjoyable family pastime which will teach the boys (and us) not to be afraid of eating out but to be cautious and aware. I also feel this episode serves us a reminder that you can never be too complacent over food served in places, even ones where you have eaten with safety before. And.....yes, we did have his medical kit containing his adrenaline and his Action Plan with us just in case!

Yours sincerely, A&AA member

Hi A&AA member,

Thank you for sharing your experience with us. It is a good reminder on how vigilant we need to be all of the time. We cannot relax our protocols because that is when things can go wrong. In saying that, being vigilant does not mean we have to be overly anxious; we just need to always be aware. That is what is so tiring about food allergy management. It needs to be at the forefront of everything we do..... even if eating at this place was safe the last ten times you dined there. There are too many things that can go wrong at each step of the way so disclosing allergy and managing risk is just so important. Thanks for sharing! Your reminder helps us all.

Kind regards, Editor. ■



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Australia**

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