

Eating differently to retake control of your health doesn't mean you have to stop living your life and stay home alone. Although it might be easier to do the elimination phase at home, this shouldn't keep you from having fun and spicing up your routine by eating out, socializing, and traveling. Things will get easier as you build your BYO diet and expand your dietary horizons, but you don't have to wait that long. A little more planning is necessary with special dietary requirements, but it can be done.

For most people, food plays a role far beyond basic nourishment. Food means love, comfort, and celebration. But saying no to someone offering you spaghetti or a piece of cake doesn't mean you don't love and appreciate them. Would you feel guilty saying you can't eat bread, peanuts, or alcohol if you had celiac disease or a peanut allergy or were a recovering alcoholic? Setting appropriate boundaries is part of self-care.

Whether it's at a family dinner, with friends over for brunch, or during a special occasion at work, you can enjoy the company of the people you love and still eat the foods that make you feel good. Most people will understand your new way of eating if you explain that you are simply trying to feel better and improve your health. If you need to, you can mention that this is not a fad diet, but a medical diet. This isn't a lie, since elimination diets are the medical gold standard to identify food sensitivities and build an optimal diet. Try to focus on conversations and enjoying your time with loved ones in. It's not the food, but the mood that truly matters.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

If you have a dinner or other special occasion planned with family or friends, take the time to let them know about your new way of eating. If you're inviting them over, it should be easy to provide options that are suitable for you. If the meal is elsewhere, make sure to discuss your situation with your hosts. Explain that you're currently eliminating certain foods to improve your health. If they are receptive and willing to make modifications to their menu to accommodate you, make sure to give them a list of foods and ingredients you can eat. If your hosts seem to find your diet too complicated, offer to bring a dish you can eat and share with everyone or, if the hosts have already planned the menu, simply bring your own meal.

AT WORK

When colleagues tempt you with bagels and muffins at a team meeting or with cake at a monthly birthday celebration, it's important to be prepared to respond. Think of how you want to handle the situation ahead of time to remove all the guesswork. You can mention that you aren't hungry, that you're avoiding gluten, or that you're trying an elimination diet to improve certain health issues. The explanation you give is up to you and depends on how much you're willing to share with your coworkers. And know that you actually don't owe any explanations to anyone. It's your body, your choice. The best option is probably to bring something you can eat along with your colleagues and not suffer the consequences of eating something that could compromise your gut health.

RESTAURANTS

Eating out at restaurants can be trickier if you have food restrictions, but it's not impossible. While eating out isn't ideal since you can't control the quality of the ingredients or the risk of cross contamination, if you plan in advance and do your homework you should be able to eat out without getting sick.

Unfortunately, an alarming majority of chefs (96 percent), including many who offer gluten-free options at their own restaurants, failed a simple four-question questionnaire about gluten knowledge administered by the National Foundation for Celiac Awareness (NFCA). Many chefs don't know that gluten can hide under many ingredients and are unaware of cross-contamination risks. Moreover, other restaurant staff may not have the knowledge required to help you choose