

Managing Dietary Requirements at Events: Checklist for Professional Conference Organisers (PCOs) and Event Planners

Delegate expectations around dietary requirements have evolved, and event processes need to keep pace. This document is intended to support PCOs and event planners by encouraging good conversations, challenging assumptions and helping deliver more inclusive, well-managed events

At the enquiry level with the client:		
<p>Consider creating a Dietary Management Policy if you don't already have one or add it into an existing EDI / accessible policy. This provides a clear framework for prioritising dietary needs and developing processes to support them effectively.</p> <p>Make sure all organisers and committee members are familiar with and committed to the policy, so they can confidently support its implementation at every stage.</p> <p>Organisers are ultimately responsible for attendees' well-being and for managing communication and coordination with suppliers.</p>	<p>The purpose of the policy is to set out your objectives for managing dietary requirements. Create the policy in collaboration with your organising team and committee. It could include any, all of, or more than the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensuring attendee safety ● Promoting inclusivity and accessibility ● Improving attendee experience ● Enhancing operational efficiency ● Strengthening communication through openness and transparency ● Reducing waste and controlling costs ● Complying with legal and ethical standards ● Gathering feedback and improving processes 	<p>Here is an example dietary management policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● To ensure attendee safety by preventing allergic reactions and food-related health risks ● To follow national food safety laws and allergen labelling regulations ● To show a clear duty of care and commitment to inclusivity ● To cater for a wide range of dietary needs and ensure all attendees feel listened to, respected and well looked after, regardless of their requirements ● To make it easy for attendees to access suitable meals without stress or confusion ● To minimise food waste from an environmental and financial sustainability point of view ● To use feedback and insights to refine processes and improve dietary management for future events
<p>Has this event been run before? (Y/N)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If yes, what diets needed catering? What was the ratio? ● If not, is there any data that can be shared from a previous event? 	

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At Registration level		
<p>What process do you use to collect and record accurate & detailed dietary requirements?</p>	<p>Provide clear pre-registration guidance so those completing the form on behalf of others know in advance what information they'll need.</p> <p>'No fish/nuts, gluten, etc. is too little detail as it does not outline the severity.</p> <p>Consider amending your terms and conditions to make it clear that accurate information is required from attendees. For example: <i>'You must notify us of any food-based allergies you may suffer from or any other dietary requirements you may have. We will communicate this to the event caterer(s). You acknowledge that without such information, the caterer(s) may not be able to provide suitable food for you.'</i></p>	<p>Gather dietary requirements during registration in a structured, consistent way that allows you to generate relevant and accurate reports.</p> <p>Ensure that everyone receiving and using any reports understands that an attendee may well have several dietary requests that need to be catered for. E.g. a pregnant woman who also has diabetes and follows the Jain faith</p>
<p>Ask if the dietary requirements are a life threatening allergy, intolerance, cultural or religious or lifestyle choice A cultural or religious choice is very different to a lifestyle choice, although they can overlap in practice.</p>	<p>Consider offering packed lunches or other takeaway options for attendees who are observing Ramadan.</p> <p>Cultural or/ religious dietary requirements are rooted in tradition, community identity, or religious law.</p>	<p>Lifestyle choices are made by an individual, usually centred on personal health, ethics, or environmental beliefs.</p>
<p>For diets that are life-threatening:</p>	<p>How will they be managed? Make contact with the attendee, asking:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The precise nature of their condition or requirements. For example, does the allergy include substances that may be airborne? • Would they like to be connected directly with the venue/caterer to create or a bespoke menu? 	<p>The 14 main allergens must be declared under UK Law. These are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Celery: Found in salads, stocks, and soups. 2. Cereals containing gluten: Present in products like bread, pasta, and baked goods. 3. Crustaceans: Includes shrimp, prawns, and scampi.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is their emergency plan? If they use an adrenaline pen, is it in date? Is there someone they would like us to contact on their behalf if they have an incident? • Devise an emergency plan with the venue/caterer. Check if they work with suppliers (e.g., Kitt Medical) for in-date adrenaline pens. Think of it as a safety check, similar to fire extinguisher servicing. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Eggs: Commonly found in cakes, mayonnaise, and some pasta dishes. 5. Fish: Can be present in sauces and some meat products. 6. Lupin: Used to make flour found in some bread, pastries, and pasta. 7. Milk: Found in cheese, butter, and other dairy products. 8. Molluscs: Examples are mussels, oysters, snails, and squid. 9. Mustard: Found in mustard seeds, powders, and sauces. 10. Tree nuts: Includes almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, and cashews. 11. Peanuts*: A common ingredient in peanut butter and some sweets. 12. Sesame seeds: Found in bread, tahini, and hummus. 13. Soya beans: Present in products like tofu, soy milk, and some sauces. 14. Sulphur dioxide and sulphites: A preservative used in dried fruits, wines, and processed meats. <p>*Please note peanuts are not a nut, but a legume & pine nuts are a seed</p> <p>Note: these ingredients may appear 'hidden' in some foodstuffs, e.g. celery in stock powders; fish in wine; tree nuts in cereals; mustard in Asian pastes/sauces, etc. Ask the venue / caterer to confirm which ingredients are used in all food and drinks.</p>
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Set up clear, accurate reports in a format that's easy to share with relevant stakeholders.	Ensure you have a template incident form to complete when a complaint is raised or an incident occurs, to ensure all relevant and correct details are captured at the time.	
At the enquiry level with the venue/caterer:		
Share the dietary management policy from the beginning to set expectations	Ask that each point be addressed.	Raising these points at the bidding stage for any event helps avoid dietary requirements becoming a challenge later, once the destination/venue/caterer has already been appointed.
Ask the venue/caterer to share their policies, processes and solutions.		
How does the venue/caterer manage staff training, including casual staff, on managing dietary requirements, especially food allergies?	<p>This is a critical point, as it is often at this point that things can often go wrong. All of the venue/catering's staff should be able to answer attendees' questions accurately and with confidence.</p> <p>Ensure a designated senior catering manager is on-site for the duration of the event to oversee service, support staff, and act as the point of escalation for any issues.</p>	
What and how will the labelling be displayed?	<p>Ask the venue/caterer about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A dietary champion – either someone in your own team or in the catering team who attendees can easily identify and approach to double check dietaries for their own peace of mind • Using a QR code for each dish • A dietary station which has the chef available to discuss the content of dishes • Adding carbohydrate content information for diabetics. 	<p>Having a dietary requirement champion is essential to ensure menus are planned and followed through appropriately, as agreed and safely.</p> <p>See our list of icons in our Further Resources, Point 2 here.</p>

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<p>What process does the venue/caterer have in place to ensure the right person receives the right dish?</p>	<p>Table plans are the most effective, but people may swap seats or change their minds. Potential solutions could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sample phrase cards for all serving staff when questioned by attendees about what ingredients are included • Provide portable allergen menu cards for serving staff so they can quickly and directly provide accurate information to attendees 	<p>Ask the venue about their escalation process. Set up a template report in case things go wrong.</p>
<p>How does the venue/caterer manage non-alcoholic/alcoholic food and drink?</p>	<p>Is it possible to have separate stations with large signposts indicating which is which?</p> <p>Non- alcoholic drinkers want the same premium experience at events as those drinking alcohol.</p>	
<p>If a separate preparation area with separate utensils is required, how will the venue/caterer manage this?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do they have prior experience? • Is a specialist caterer required and does the venue/caterer organise this? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If so, is there an extra cost implication? - If not, can they connect you with a specialist caterer? • What systems are in place to prevent cross-contact contamination 	<p>If you are organising specialist catering, ensure you purchase only from approved suppliers.</p> <p>This should also apply to other specific dietary requirements, such as gluten-free provision for attendees with Coeliac disease, including the use of separate utensils, crockery and glassware to minimise the risk of cross-contamination.</p> <p>For venues offering overnight accommodation, it's important to be clear on how dietary requirements are managed across breakfast, room service and other food and beverage outlets.</p>

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Ask the venue/caterer if they'd consider having the chef attend the event to share the menu, including where foodstuffs are sourced and dietaries.	This is a great way for attendees to meet one of the faces behind the scenes.	
How can you work together to avoid/minimise:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Last-minute changes/substitutions with deliveries ● Volumes of food, range of menus and spread of locations ● Allergies outside of the 14 ● Ambiguous information ● Surprises 	
If the right combination of meals are not provided and additional meals have to be made, determine who will cover the cost and under what criteria?		
When attending a site visit, ask the venue/caterer about the option of having a tasting session. Consider adding this as part of the RFP process	This will showcase the venue/caterer's knowledge of dietary requirements, labelling, communication, and impact, which should give you dietaries, labelling, communications, impact, etc., etc which should give you the confidence that they will manage your attendees' dietary requirements during the event.	
Ensure all communication is clear and documented	This is beyond labelling – this includes communications with the venue/caterer with regards to other staff onsite or other events taking place in the same location, the attendees, staff, suppliers, other users in the venue, e.g. other event attendees	This is to help those attendees who may have a life-threatening condition, which may be triggered by airborne foodstuffs
Do keep an evidence trail of dietary requirement reports that can be shared with suppliers, including venues		

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Post event evaluation		
Ask attendees for their feedback on the catering at the event, and specifically talk to those who advised in advance of any dietary requirements	Use this feedback for a mop-up meeting with the committee/client, as well as the venue/caterer/supplier, so that all can learn from the experience and insights gained to refine processes and improve dietary management for future events	
What worked well and why?	Can this be replicated for future events?	
What areas are there for improvement?	Were there any serious outcomes that need to be learned from?	
Was all the information that was captured relevant and accurate?		

Further resources:

1. [Glossary of dietary requirement terms](#)
2. [Registration Form to Collect Allergen Data](#): Credit to Levy
3. [Low / no alcohol drinks at events](#) - White paper by Club Soda and Desert Island Events
4. [The impact of weight loss injections on the hospitality industry](#)
5. [Neurodiversity in Events Checklist](#)
6. [EDI at Events](#)