

KITCHEN TEAM – Special Diets

In recent years, many more needs and requests for special diet considerations have come to the table. Feeding people is a way to show love, and the Kitchen team always tries to do their very best to feed people well and show love in this way. Guests need to know that they will be able to eat without getting sick or having dietary-related issues that will prevent them from fully participating in their weekend. It is very important that we take the utmost care to keep everyone healthy, safe, and well fed.

Also, in recent years, a few kitchen team members have almost “lost their minds” trying to accommodate many different diets, restrictions and preferences. Often, this is not only from guests but also from team members. Some Kitchen teams have had to have one team member with the sole responsibility of planning for, cooking for, and serving special diet people. We DO want to help make the Great Banquet a special and wonderful place to be fed, both physically and spiritually. However, limits must be set on how much we are able to do, as we are not a full-service restaurant.

Here are a few guidelines to help you know how much is too much:

- Dietary considerations should be related to existing medical condition(s), not preferences in one’s daily diet. A side table is provided with alternative meal options if someone does not “enjoy” one of the meals provided.
- Gluten-free and vegetarian meals should be an option that is available if needed.
- Team members with special dietary restrictions should be encouraged to speak with the Kitchen team Head in advance of the weekend.
- It is wise to plan your meals with gluten-free and vegetarian diets in mind and attempt to serve things that can easily be adapted for these diets. For example, substituting corn chips for flour tortillas in a Mexican meal; substituting gluten-free pasta for regular pasta, but using the same sauce in an Italian meal; substituting a lettuce wrap instead of a bun as a gluten-free option. It is NOT a good idea to make a totally different-looking meal from the main meal, as others may then say, “I want what SHE’S having!”. Sometimes it cannot be avoided but try your best!
- Desserts are also an area to remember to plan for. Dessert is a decadent treat and people with special diets don’t want to miss out. Planning things that all can eat (or substituting easy alternatives) is important. For example, chocolate-dipped strawberries are an excellent and easy gluten-free substitution; ice cream is also an easy, no-prep dessert!
- If you want help with desserts or bakery items for breakfast, ZPC has a good relationship with a special need’s bakery. It is located in Carmel and they are wonderful to work with! Again, if possible, have them make something comparable to what everyone else is having.

Simple Taste Bakery Owner: Jenny Cleave
317-408-6258 www.simple-taste.com

Dedicated gluten-free, dairy-free, corn-free, and yeast-free.
Also available: soy, nut and egg-free.

Some other things to keep in mind:

1. It is best if one person on the Kitchen team is the “point person” for special diets. Someone needs to know exactly what people can and can’t have.
2. The “point person” should call each guest or team member (in advance of the weekend) who communicates a special need to learn exactly what they need. It is OK to lovingly confirm that this is a medical need for the special diet. Reassure them that you will be handling their food needs for the weekend, and they can reach out to you at any time. For serious issues, going through the menu together often makes them feel loved and understood.
3. It’s very important that a system be put in place for the serving of special diet plates. Volunteers will not know if someone cannot have something and will simply set a plate down in front of every person. Have a plan for this! It is embarrassing and annoying for someone to have to constantly tell our volunteers that they cannot have that...that they have a special diet. For example, different colored cards set on the place setting in front of the guest have been used; name cards on small wire stands have been used to identify special diet people. You can come up with your own plan, but there must be a way for volunteers to know NOT to put down a regular plate in front of this person. If someone has a very serious allergy or condition, telling them not to accept a plate from anyone but the point person is a good idea too. They need to feel SAFE in what they are eating.
4. The point person should work closely with the Kitchen Head in determining menus and special items for the shopping lists. Menus for special diets MUST BE POSTED somewhere in the Kitchen. If an emergency arises during the weekend and the point person must leave, the Kitchen team needs to know how to identify and feed the people.
5. Men typically have fewer special dietary needs than women, but it is a good idea for the men’s and women’s “point persons” to talk, share ideas, and also for any special diet groceries to be passed on after the first banquet finishes.

While this can be a very time-consuming piece of the Kitchen’s team’s weekends, it can also be one that shows more love than anything else during the weekend for someone who has a special dietary need. Set limits where you need to, plan wisely and well, and have FUN making this weekend a special experience for all!

Should you have questions or need to talk through some things with someone, please feel free to contact:

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