



10 STEPS

to a

*safe & friendly*

KITCHEN

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# 10 STEPS TO A *safe & friendly* KITCHEN

Food allergies & intolerance; severe sensitivities; gastrointestinal disorders; autoimmune diseases, chronic illness--the reasons for revising your food life and overhauling your kitchen as endless as they are important.

Making your kitchen a safe and friendly spot where your whole family feels both validated and welcomed helps put joy back on the table.

Rethinking and revamping your space takes time and energy, but it can most certainly be done.

These 10 steps helped our family figure out works for us--even while juggling multiple food allergies, intolerances, severe sensitivities *and* autoimmune diseases. If we can do it, I know you can do it too!

# STEP 1: RALLY AROUND YOUR REASON

Let's start here: *Who* is your *why*?

Letting go of old patterns and making room for new procedures gets easier when your reason points to a person you love.

Name your reason(s), then rally around them.

## STEP 2: DETERMINE YOUR DIRECTION

Once you know your *reason*, think about your *direction*.  
Set a goal for what you want to achieve.

This might include:

- Eliminating allergens and keeping them out of your kitchen
- Adjusting ingredients to accommodate dietary restrictions
- Overhauling your pantry to accommodate various needs
- Improving your family's overall health and wellness
- Redefining what's "normal" in your family's diet
- Creating an inviting, inclusive kitchen culture

Keep your family's unique needs in mind to help determine realistic, achievable goals.

## STEP 3: CREATE AN OFF-LIMITS LIST

Some foods may be permissible for some family members, while other foods may be off limits for everyone. Talk about it as a team; then decide what foods are always off-limits, for whom, and why. Put your list in a visible spot so the rules are clear.

### The Off-Limits List:

- ✔ Specify foods that are never allowed in your kitchen. Include names of family members with medical
- ✔ conditions related to the off-limits food.  
Example:  
DAIRY (EJ: anaphylactic allergy to dairy and all products containing them)  
List common names for these foods (ie: milk, butter) along with their less common names (ie: casein, whey,
- ✔ lactic acid starter culture).

## STEP 4: LEARN ABOUT LABELS

Educate yourself about what to look for in an ingredient list and how to interpret ingredient claims and allergen statements.

- Find out about food certification labels (Certified Gluten Free, Certified Nut-Free, Certified Paleo, Certified Vegan, Kosher, etc.)
- Learn to distinguish allergen statements (contains, may contain, made on shared equipment, made in a shared facility, etc.). Decide what allergen statements matter for *your family*. Visit the Food Allergy Research and Education (FARE) website for an excellent beginner's guide to reading labels.

### Don't forget:

*Read labels every single time. Call the manufacturer if you have any doubt.*

## STEP 5: PURGE THE PANTRY

1. Look closely at every food item in your kitchen. Start with the refrigerator, then move on to the pantry (or vice versa). Consider every item with your off-limits list in mind.

2. Return unopened, safe foods to the shelves (ie: unopened jars of applesauce); donate or give away unopened off-limits food (i.e.: jars of peanut butter).

3. Throw away open containers that have been or may have been contaminated by off-limits food. (i.e.: open jars of jam that contain traces of peanut butter or gluten; canisters of sugar contaminated with all purpose wheat flour).

Remember: *When in doubt, throw it out.*

## STEP 6: CELEBRATE SAFE FOODS

Don't dwell on what your family *can't* have. Instead, focus your attention on foods your family can have.

Make list of your favorite safe foods. Have fun thinking of all the ways to enjoy these foods together. (Love tacos? Have a weekly taco night! Does your family love deli-style sandwiches? Try having an indoor picnic for dinner.)

Explore other safe foods and add to your list as you discover new favorites. Celebrate when you see your list grow. Practice gratitude for everything your family can enjoy together safely.

### Tip:

Make a list of safe snack ideas and post inside pantry doors so older kids and caregivers can quickly and easily identify what is safe to eat at snack time.

For younger children who can't read, put stickers on packages of safe foods that identify snacks that are safe for them.



# STEP 7: CONSIDER CONTAMINATION

Cross-contact and cross-contamination are a big deal with Celiac Disease, Gluten Sensitivity, and food allergies.

Remnants of off-limits foods linger on your kitchenware.

Clean what you can; replace what you must.

- Scrub stainless steel utensils and pots and pans with hot, soapy water.
- Replace tools made with wood and plastic (cutting board, utensils, rolling pin, bowls, spatulas). When going gluten free, replace colanders too. (Gluten likes to hide in the holes.)
- Address appliances: toasters, food processors, air fryers, waffle makers, slow cookers, etc. need careful consideration as well.
- Prevent cross contamination by designating tools and work areas for specific ingredients, if necessary.

# STEP 8: PREPARE AN EMERGENCY PLAN

Unexpected allergic reactions and other medical emergencies can happen even in the most diligently safe & friendly kitchens. Mitigate panic by being prepared.

- Work with your doctor to establish an emergency action plan tailored to your family's medical conditions.
- Designate a cabinet for emergency supplies. Stock it with antihistamines, epinephrine, hydrocortisone, and any other emergency medications your family requires.
- Post the emergency action plan on the inside door of the same cabinet.
- Post an infographic about the signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis or other severe reactions on the inside door of the emergency cabinet too.
- Make sure everyone in your home knows the procedure for what to do if/when a reaction occurs.
- Review how to use and renew prescriptions annually.

## 9. EMBRACE THE ADVENTURE

Change is a chance for fun! Adapting and adjusting your kitchen culture gives you a unique opportunity to branch out of your comfort zone and discover new things.

- Learn about unfamiliar cuisines
- Splurge on a trendy new appliance
- Experiment with unusual flavor combinations
- Brainstorm family dinner theme nights
- Add music to your dinnertime routine
- Use beautiful linens to dress up your table
- Treat yourself to a fresh bouquet of flowers for the table
- Establish new family rhythms and traditions

### Bottom line:

Food might be limited, but creativity doesn't have to be.

## 10. GIVE YOURSELF GRACE

Adjusting to a new way of thinking about food and (re)learning how to feed your family safely takes time and energy, so make sure to give yourself lots of grace.

Trial and error is part of the process. Laugh when things go wrong; cry a little if you need to, too--then celebrate when things go right. Over time you will find what works for you and what just plain doesn't.

What works for one family might not work for another, but that is part of what makes each family unique. Celebrate what makes yours so special!

Bring a positive attitude into the kitchen along with you so that your *Why* knows they are absolutely worth the effort.