



# **SPECIAL DIET MENU POLICY**

## **THE PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to outline the requirements and best practice for providing safe meals for pupils with special dietary requirements at primary school sites that The Pantry cater for.

## **THE PANTRY SPECIAL DIET MENUS**

Special diet menus are developed for pupils that cannot safely eat from the main menu due to a medical condition, such as severe or complex allergies. Special diet menus may also be allocated to pupils who have medical conditions of which nutrients like fat, carbohydrates and protein need to be measured e.g. PKU or cystic fibrosis.

## **MEDICAL DOCUMENTATION REQUIRED FOR A SPECIAL DIET MENU**

For a special diet menu to be implemented, medical documentation **MUST** be given. The medical documentation provided to us must;

- Be the most up to date copy
- Clearly display the child's full name & date of birth
- Confirm the exact allergens to exclude and/or medical condition(s)
- Confirm if an EpiPen or other medication is required (the parent & the school must then confirm that the school hold the required medication)
- Be translated to the English language, signed off by a medical professional

Once the medical documentation is received, there is a 3-week turn around period to implement a special diet menu, depending on the severity of the requirements.

The parent is responsible for updating us and the school with any changes regarding allergens/medical conditions for their child.

If medical documentation is not provided, the parent can use The Pantry online ordering system to "self-manage" their child's meal orders.

If a child does have medical documentation for their medical condition, however the parent prefers to utilise The Pantry online ordering system, they must sign a waiver form to indicate their acceptance to "self-manage" lunch orders moving forward. For pupils who have allergies outside of the 14 Major Food Allergens, such as an allergy to apples, and do not have medical documentation, the parents must continue to order their child's lunch via The Pantry online system. The parent can request ingredient lists for the foods provided, however as there could be supplier changes, these are only valid from the date and time that the ingredient list is given to the parent.

Ingredient lists and nutritional information about the food served can be requested from The Pantry nutrition team at any time via [nutrition@thepantrycatering.co.uk](mailto:nutrition@thepantrycatering.co.uk).



## **SELF-MANAGING LUNCH ORDERS**

Upon registration of a new pupil's account, the parent will be able to register their child's allergens. If medical documentation cannot be provided, or specific allergens are avoided due to preference, or the parent does not want a special diet menu for their child, the parent can self-manage lunch orders, rather than a special diet menu being implemented. A waiver form will be sent to the parent via email if a special diet menu is not required, which they must sign to unblock their child's account to place orders. All recorded allergens remain on the account.

Once the waiver has been signed, the account will be unblocked. The parent will only be able to view and order meals which do not contain the allergens recorded on the child's account.

## **ALLERGEN LADDERS & MAY CONTAINS**

Our kitchens will not accommodate the process of introducing allergen ladders to a pupil's special diet menu. Exclusion of allergens must continue, and any allergen ladder processes must be managed by the parent at home.

If we have record of an allergen on our records for a pupil, all forms of that allergen will be excluded, unless update information is provided. Any requests to include for example a 'may contain', 'baked', or 'cooked' form of that allergen will be rejected.

## **MEAL CHOICE ON SPECIAL DIET MENUS**

Our nutritionists will develop a special diet menu using the exact details provided on the medical documentation. Any further requests for personalisation of special diet menus, not supported by medical documentation, may be rejected or unable to be upheld.

The Pantry does not treat cultural or religious diets, veganism or vegetarianism as a special diet as our menus offer a diverse range of foods to cater for pupils to eat a healthy balanced meal daily.

## **OPERATIONAL SAFETY**

There are many factors involved with the management of special diet menu implementation and service and ensuring that our pupils are given a safe lunch is our priority. If we deem that the complexity of the special diet menu request is too high, and this impacts the ability to provide safe meals for the pupil, the request may be rejected.

To ensure each special diet meal can be made following our process, more than one meal choice per day is not possible to offer pupils on special diet menus. The special diet menus include 1 allocated meal per day, a side and a dessert/fruit, and a safe cold meal back-up, which is approved by the parent.

On the occasion that it may be necessary to amend the meal choice for a customer without notice, due to appliance or stock issues for example, the meal provided will be aligned with the medical information provided. This decision is solely based on what is operationally able and safe to provide.

The Pantry endeavours to inform parents if there are ingredient changes that affect the 14 Major Food Allergens present in the menu, or if they affect special diet menus. This may not always be possible, and a safe decision may need to be made without notice to the parent, which will be based on the information recorded on the child's account.

Although special diet menus are exempt from government school food standards, we do make every possible effort to ensure special diet menus fit within this guidance.

Special Diet Menu Policy (SDMP27092024)



The Pantry will not intentionally use nuts or any product containing nuts as an ingredient within our food offers.

Each special diet meal is prepared by following our procedures in a designated 'special diet meal preparation area' of the kitchen. Equipment, utensils, and surfaces are cleaned thoroughly between each different meal being made. Cross contamination is avoided, and free-from ingredients such as gluten free pasta and milk free cheese can be used, however due to the nature of the kitchen, we cannot guarantee that the meals provided are 100% free-from.

Each special diet meal is prepared before service and placed into a labelled foil tray and kept in a hot counter until the time of service for the pupil. Any items which are to be kept chilled (fruit) or frozen (ice cream) will be stored separately in the fridge or freezer, also labelled.

## **SEVERE ALLERGIES AND MENU CHANGES**

Schools must discuss with The Pantry any requests for catering for severe allergies, if this should result in allergens or ingredients being removed/excluded from the standard school menu.

Exclusion of specific allergens or ingredients from the standard school menu may be unrealistic, and therefore have an impact on the variety of dishes available for the whole school. If this is the case, this must be included in the contract between the school and The Pantry.

## **THEME DAYS & SPECIAL DIETS**

Whilst The Pantry are passionate about inclusion for all pupils, safety is our priority, and if there are complexities involved in developing a safe theme day special diet meal for a pupil, the pupil will be offered an alternative meal instead. The allocated meal will be the safe cold meal option which has been previously agreed with the parent, or a meal aligned with the medical information we hold.

## **FUSSY EATERS & BEHAVIOURAL CONDITIONS AFFECTING DIET**

General fussy eating and preferences will not require a special diet menu.

Medical documentation must be provided for a special diet menu to be made for pupils with diagnosed restrictive food intake, or behavioural conditions affecting diet. e.g. food aversions, ARFID, or autism.

On some occasions, managing a child's food preference at site level may be more applicable. On such occasions, this must be agreed with the parent, the nutritionist, the operation manager, the kitchen staff, and the school.

## **QUERIES**

All queries regarding special diet menus, or nutritional information, should be directed to the nutrition department via email. [Nutrition@thepantrycatering.co.uk](mailto:Nutrition@thepantrycatering.co.uk).

**Policy updated 27.09.2024**

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