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Guide to Managing Conference Delegate Dietary Requirements

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Introduction

In recent years, meeting planners from the around the globe, participating in IACC's *Meeting Room of the Future™* research, education sessions and forums, are highlighting a significant increase in dietary and allergen requests from their delegates. Many planners reported events where over 50% of the delegates provide personal dietary and allergen requirements during registration. This increase in demand has resulted in new challenges and pressures for meeting planners and venues.

More and more of our delegates attending our events are identifying with dietary restrictive lifestyles and the management of specific dietary requirements cannot be avoided. Dietary requirements can be of a medical, religious or lifestyle nature, so it is important to display openness and creativity as a planner. Whether you're arranging a refreshment break table, coffee and tea, or a full-blown gala dinner menu, providing a menu with multiple choices is essential to your meeting's success and is not as difficult as it was a few years ago, particularly with our guide of definitions and recommendations.

IACC with the help of industry partners, experts and contributors, have compiled a roadmap to help manage the collection, compilation communicating of delegate needs and provide help and tips in partnering with the venue and to ensuring delegates health and wellbeing is catered for.

The guide will also provide information and advice on the different kinds of dietary and allergen requests planners are likely to encounter.

In partnership with the World Obesity Federation, this guide will provide advice on how to place delegate health and wellbeing at the heart of the event without compromising on experience.

Dietary requirements and allergen requests - the difference

It is important to separate requests from delegates, into different categories. A request for a certain type of food for the purposes of personal preference or to fit into a dietary program, is different from a dietary request because of a medical-related and/or allergic reaction, which will impact the delegate's health and wellbeing. Different again are dietary requests for religious reasons. All are important, but should be considered and managed separately, as this guide will detail later.

What is an allergy?

According to the FARE (Food Allergy Research & Education) a food allergy is defined as medical condition in which exposure to a food triggers a harmful immune response. Reactions and symptoms can vary from person to person but in most cases mild allergies can cause: hives, itchy mouth and fevers while more severe allergies can lead to throat tightening, difficulty breathing and even anaphylaxis, a severe allergic reaction that typically involves more than one system of the body and can be fatal.

Venue operators should be fully compliant with food labelling legislation in their city, state, region or country. Meeting planners should also be familiar with legislation and rules for the country and/or state/province they are running their meeting or event.

TIP: Quick links information related to food labelling can be found on page 12.



Primary dietary requests meeting planners encounter

As planners and venue operators you must be knowledgeable about the kinds of dietary requests you may encounter. These requests will vary from allergens to religious or health related requests.

Common diets

Vegetarian
(including Ovo, Lacto and Ovo-Lacto Vegetarian)

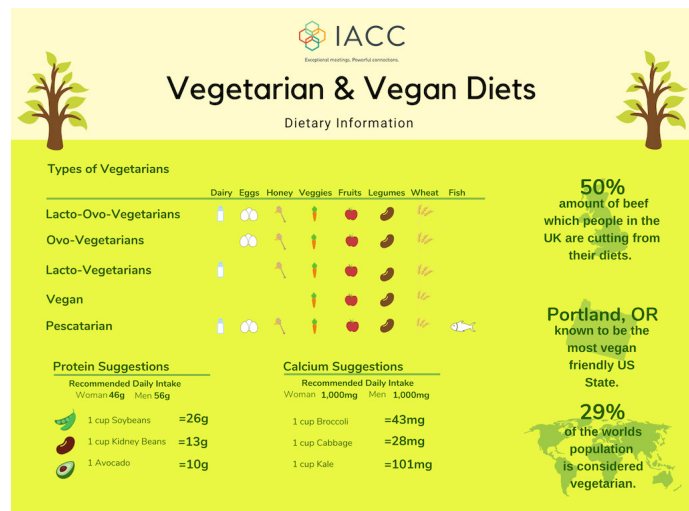
Vegan

Pescatarian

Ketogenic Diet
(low carb, high fat)

Paleo Diet, MIND Diet

Flexitarian



Less common diets

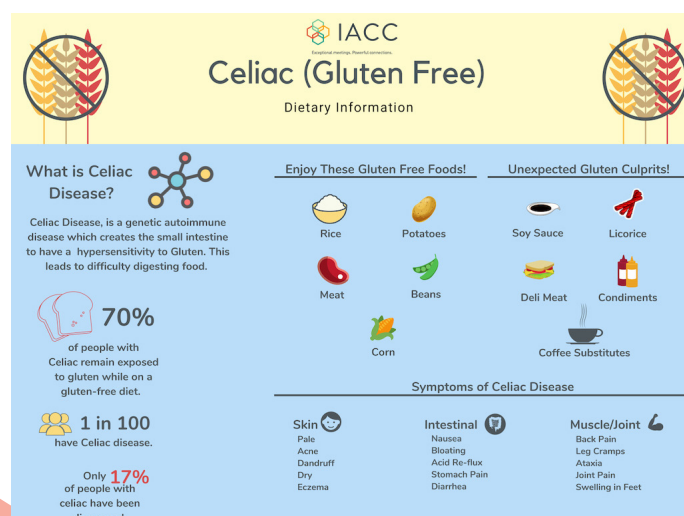
Paleo

Ketogenic

Whole 30



TIP: Download the graphic here



TIP: Download the graphic here

Health related diets

Gluten Free

Celiac Disease

Diabetes

Religious / cultural diets:

Kosher

U

IACC
Kosher
Dietary Information

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What is a Kosher Diet?

Kosher foods are those that conform to the Jewish dietary regulations of kashrut. Kosher means 'Fit' or 'Proper' often associated with the cleanliness and purity of food.

40% of packaged goods in a supermarket are certified Kosher.

There are over **10.5** million Kosher consumers in the United States.

A kosher kitchen sterilized, and inspected by a Rabbi. All pots, pans, ovens, stoves & utensils must not cross contaminate dairy and meats.

Pareve

Foods that are neither meat or dairy are called Pareve. These foods are considered Kosher as long as they have not been made or come in contact with equipment that has also contacted meat or dairy.

Dairy

Dairy products must come from a Kosher Animal and free of all meat derivatives. Kosher dairy and Kosher meats can not be mixed and must be prepared with Kosher utensils.

Proteins & Butchering

Meat and fowl must follow certain requirements to be considered Kosher: Kosher meats must come from animals that chew their cud and have split hooves. Fowl such as chicken, turkey, duck are considered Kosher, birds of prey are not. All animals are butchered following specific rituals which are considered the most humane for the animals.

← Kosher
Not Kosher →

TIP: A venue often requires 7 days' notice to order in kosher food and for placing general food orders.



TIP: Download the graphic here

Halal

حلال

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Halal
Dietary Information

حلال

What is Halal?

Halal translates to permissible, or lawful. Rules for halal are based on Islamic Shari'ah and animals or poultry have to be slaughtered in a ritual way known as Zabihah.

Zabihah

In order to follow Zabihah, Animals and Fowl must alive prior to butchering. The slaughter must be done by inflicting the least amount of pain to the animal as possible.

Tips for Planning Halal Meals

- Do not prepare anything with Alcohol as it is also forbidden to consume under the Halal restrictions.
- Display the Halal certification symbol, food ingredient label or Halal store receipt.
- Provide a vegetarian entrée using legumes as an alternative to meat dishes. Please note that not all seafood options are Halal.

Forbidden Food

Pork

Birds of Prey

Animals who Hunt with Teeth

Snakes

Non-ritualistic Slaughter

Insects

Harmful to Humans
Alcohol, Toxins & Narcotics



TIP: Download the graphic here

Religious / Cultural diets - continued

Jainism

Forbidden: Meat and Dairy unless the dairy has been extracted without violence. (Meaning Lacto-vegetarian). Root vegetables pulled from below ground.

Fasting: There are many fasting occasions during the year, mostly during festivals. People are only required to fast upon ability. This practice is called *upavasa*, *tapasya* or *vrata*

Bahá'í

Forbidden: Alcohol

Fast: Bahá'ís abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sunset.

Buddhism

Forbidden: None. Many people will not eat meat or fish however.

Fast: Only for Buddhist monks.

Christianity

Forbidden: None.

Fast: Catholics will refrain from consuming meat on Fridays of Lent and on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

Hinduism

Forbidden: Meat, fish, poultry and eggs. Some people also avoid garlic, onions, alcohol, tea and coffee.

Fast: Sundays, day of the new moon, the full moon, 10th and 11th of each month, the feast of Shivaratri, the 9th day of the month of Cheltra, the 8th day of Sravana, and days of eclipses, equinoxes, solstices, and conjunction of the planets.

Judaism

Forbidden: Emulsifiers and stabilizers of animal origin, gelatin, non-kosher meat, birds of prey and non-kosher fish such as prawns, shellfish, turbot skate and sturgeon.

Fast: Yom Kippur and Tisha b'Av, during this time eating and drinking are forbidden for a 25-hour period. Partial fast days (no food or drink from sunrise to sunset) include Tzom Gedallah, Tenth of Tevet and Seventeenth of Tamuz, Ta'anit Ester and Ta'anit Bechorim.

Islam

Forbidden: Pork, lard or any pork substance, gelatin from animal source that is not halal, meat that is not slaughtered in the prescribed Islamic way, meat coming from a lawful animal which died before slaughter, blood, any food or drink with alcohol, all carnivorous animals and birds of prey and some non-halal additives.

Fast: Voluntary fasting is common on Mondays and Thursdays. Ramadan is a mandatory fasting period. Muslims are also encouraged to fast 6 days during the month of Shawwal, on the 10th day of Muharram, and the 9th day of Zul Hijjah. Fasting in Islam involves abstaining from food, water and beverages from Dawn to sunset.



Typical allergen & intolerances you will encounter

Here are eight of the most common food types that cause allergic reactions

Most common food (protein) allergens:

- ◆ Peanuts (1 in 50 children)
- ◆ Tree nuts (for example: cashews, walnuts)
- ◆ Shellfish
- ◆ Fish
- ◆ Milk
- ◆ Eggs
- ◆ Soy
- ◆ Wheat

Sesame is also a common allergen. Sesame is listed on the EU, Australia, Japan and Canada list as a top allergen but it is still being considered by the FDA pending approval.



Collecting the information from delegates

The best time to collect any meal specific information is when the guest initially registers for the event. The information sought from delegates can be influenced by many factors, including the event destination, delegate origins and culture, religion and even organisational culture.

Registration process

The delegate registration process is a critical stage in the management of delegates needs and this section of the guide gives guidance on how to avoid falling into common traps and making the management difficult leading up to and during an event.

What not to do!

Avoid at all costs, adding an open text box, which simply asks delegates to enter in free-text 'Any Dietary Requirements'. This will result in a single category of everything from the *need-to-have*, to the *like-to-have*.

To properly manage dietary requirements, we must approach information gathering stage with proper structure.

Possible approaches

It is important to establish what you as the event planner or company will cater for in terms of dietary needs of your delegates.

Collecting Allergen Information

Every event planner and venue will be duty bound to manage delegate requirements which have health related consequences and are highly unlikely to refuse registration because of this. Therefore it is assumed that collecting the specifics of a delegate's allergen will be required.

Common diets

Vegetarian and vegan are widely catered for as a matter of course. Some venues may require specific numbers requiring each, but many will provide solutions for a usual percentage of delegates based on past experience. But where a venue requires this information in advance or when a meeting planner wishes to have this information, it should be asked for at the registration stage.

Like vegetarian options, in professional conference venues and hotels, gluten-free is a regular choice on conference menus. It is important to ascertain this in advance with the venue and to add to the registration form if needing to identify and instruct the venue.

Kosher and halal are also common requests which a reputable venue will be able to provide for, but in most cases the venue will need to know in advance, sometimes with a minimum number of days advance notice. This information is important to know in advance because majority of venues will need to acquire the Kosher or Halal meals from an outside, certified Kosher or Halal Restaurant in order to follow the regulations behind the diets

Other dietary requests

Requests which can be deemed as more preference, rather than an essential requirement for health or religious reasons, need to be considered according to the preferences of the event organisers. They may choose to not accept/cater for personal preferences, provide for them but at a charge, or accept and provide for certain or all personal preferences.

If these requests are accepted, it is important understand from the venue, any charges in addition to menu or delegate package rates, that will be incurred. It is equally important that any costs to be incurred by the delegate, be included in the registration process.

Information gathering at the registration stage

It is important to decide in advance, how to categorise the dietary information collected and then create specific fields in the registration form or online form to group requests. For instance;



IACC dietary planning form download

Most online registration platforms used widely by planners today, will allow for any number of fields, check-boxes and tick box options to be created. Once created for one event it is often easy to copy over to subsequent events.

Review stage

Leading up to the conference or event, enough time should be given to review, collate and communicate requirements to the venue. Remember that the venue needs time to review, plan and order in food to accommodate needs and may also need to check information with the planner and/or the delegate.

TIP: Ask the venue to confirm receipt of your list of dietary requirements. Best practice ask that your request form is signed and returned.

If the registration form has separated allergens from other diets, which it is suggested should be the case, then these should be reviewed and considered as a priority. Any ambiguity or missing information should be followed up with the delegate.

TIP: Request with the venue that dietary needs are included in the BEO/Event Order.

Supplementary charges & communicating needs with the venue

Managing extra charges

If you do not consider this in advance, it can be a tough situation to manage. If the attendee's request is fairly reasonable and affordable, in most cases the host of the event will foot the bill.

On occasion, attendees or even presenters can be very specific with their food and beverage choices and in some extreme circumstances they should be asked to foot the bill or absorb some sort of fee for their additional request. Examples of this would be asking you to bring in an expensive or rare ingredient that isn't already a part of your menu. These are situations where you might include an upcharge on the meal.

You should clarify in advance, prior to contracting with the venue, which dietary and allergen requests they can cater for. It is also important to gain full understanding of any supplementary charges a venue will make in order to cater for delegate requests. This may influence what delegate's requests are accepted and/or any charges you wish to pass on to the delegate to meet their needs.

It is unlikely that a venue will charge a supplement to cater for allergen related needs, but they may pass on charges to cater for non-health related dietary or religious needs.

Communicating needs with the venue

Before your event you should have a meal planning discussion with your venue. You want to be aware of how the food will be served, for example, buffet style, plated, stations, etc.

You should also know the type of meal options your delegates will encounter. Will the food be labelled clearly with ingredients listed? Will they be able to choose their dishes or if plated will the staff be knowledgeable on the food being served?

It is not wise to see dietary choices as a personal option, as often they are medically, religiously or culturally necessary and should be taken seriously. Dietary restrictions should not be taken lightly; everyone should know that they can pose a health risk if someone is served the wrong ingredient.

When sending dietary and allergen information to the venue, setting out the instructions clearly, by delegate name and well in advance of the event (usually at least 7 days) is important. Consider categorising into three sections/lists; one for Allergens/intolerances, one for dietary requests and one for specific religious requests.

Also understand the protocols of the venue related to food allergies. How is contamination prevented in the kitchens?

Tip: When sharing delegate dietary needs, seek acknowledgement of receipt by the venue and suggest a cut-off date for any queries by return or requests to speak with delegates directly.

Delegate contact with the venue

In certain situations, a venue may suggest speaking with the delegate directly, in order to discuss their personal needs. This can be a very effective way to ensure their needs are understood and met with satisfaction. For a meeting planner, it is important to know when this has taken place and what is being provided, so as to remain fully knowledgeable.

TIP: For delegates allergen related needs, communicate these with the venue well in advance and ensure where health consequences from contamination are high risk to health. Ask the venue to acknowledge in writing that they will comply with the requirements.

Communicating with the delegate

For common dietary requests, it may not be necessary to do anything other than include a simple acknowledgment in the registration confirmation.

Where the requirement and/or solution is more tailored or complex, it is recommended to replay this to the delegate in advance and ensure it meets with their needs. Otherwise, there is risk of the delegate having an issue at the event and suffering the embarrassment of having to call it out in front of other delegates which can sometimes cause distress.

When communicating with your delegates we highly recommend including information about what will be served, how it will be served and how the food will be labeled. This creates an organized meeting environment while also avoiding confusion and food waste.

During the conference or event

It is important that delegates with allergen or dietary needs are not left feeling like second class citizens or isolated when catering for their specific needs. You should Work with the venue on a method to identify the guests with dietary restrictions. With clear communication of information to the delegate in advance and on arrival, the risk of this is reduced substantially.

Where the delegate's needs are linked to allergens or intolerances, it is highly recommended that a further review of their specific needs takes place with the meeting planner and venue on arrival to ensure there has been no miscommunication or assumption made which put the individual at risk.

Health & wellbeing at conferences & events

More and more event planners are seeking healthier options for their delegates. From healthier coffee breaks through to encouraging standing space in meetings and standing ovations. Unhealthy diets and sedentary lifestyles increase the risk of obesity, diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease..

Healthy meeting environments improve delegate productivity and leave them with a positive memory of the event. By working with a venue which embraces this, your event will stand out and delegates will feel their wellbeing is being considered.

The World Obesity Federation has researched the meetings industry and in 2016 launched Healthy Venues award. Healthy Venues aims to create opportunities to nudge people towards healthier choices during a time when they are stepping outside of their normal routines.

Meeting and events venues can apply for the Healthy Venues award and develop their facilities and culinary program by transforming each conference into a healthy and enjoyable experience. For more Information about becoming a healthy venue please email enquiries@worldobesity.org

Key recommendations

- Base recipes on fresh produce, with plenty of fruit and vegetables on offer
- Offer whole grain bread, pasta and rice where possible
- Offer appropriate portion sizes
- Limit the use of salt when cooking, and opt for low salt ingredients
- Limit the use of added sugar and offer fruit-based desserts and snacks as alternatives to cakes and sweets.
- Reduce the use of fat used in cooking, opting for oils and reduced fat dairy
- Offer fresh, lean and white meats and fish rather than processed and red meat
- Have sauces and dressings on the side, allowing guests to choose what they have and how much.

Clients can be encouraged to opt for healthy options by ensuring they are widely available, easy to choose, incorporated into all menus and available at no extra cost.

Sign posting healthier options can be useful for delegates wishing to have a healthier diet



Quick links information related to food labelling legislation

European Union

https://ec.europa.eu/food/safety/labelling_nutrition/labelling_legislation_en

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52017XC1213\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52017XC1213(01))

https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/labelling_nutrition-vitamins_minerals-guidance_tolerances_summary_table_012013_en.pdf

https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/labelling_nutrition-vitamins_minerals-guidance_tolerances_1212_en.pdf

https://ec.europa.eu/food/sites/food/files/safety/docs/labelling_legislation_guidance_methods_2012_en.pdf

United States

The Food Allergen Labelling and Consumer Protection Act (FALCPA)

<https://www.fda.gov/Food/GuidanceRegulation/GuidanceDocumentsRegulatoryInformation/Allergens/ucm106187.html>

Australia & New Zealand

Food allergies and food labelling <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/consumer/foodallergies/pages/allergen-labelling.aspx>

Japan

<https://label-bank.com/newsletter/issues/201706.html>

IACC-blog - food and wellness trends



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Exceptional meetings. Powerful connections.

About IACC

The IACC Vision: IACC is a community of passionate people and organisations delivering innovative and exceptional meeting experiences.

Downloads

IACC's other research and planner guides and tools at IACCmeetings.com:

- IACC Meeting Room of the Future (Global reports)
- Guide to Internet for Planners
- Guide to Delegate Nutrition and Dietary Management
- Finding an IACC certified venue

Founded in 1981, IACC is a not-for-profit association dedicated to promoting understanding and awareness of the meetings venue industry and to giving member properties the tools necessary to provide an exceptional IACC meeting experience. Active members meet a set of stringent Quality Standards and agree to a Code of Ethics. Currently, the association includes approximately 300 members from the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Mongolia, Kenya, Nigeria, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, England, Scotland, Ukraine, The Netherlands, Germany, Russia, Hungary, Malaysia and the Philippines.

For more information, visit the website at www.iacconline.org

“There are meetings and then there are IACC meetings”

About World Obesity Federation

World Obesity Federation is a global community dedicated to solving the problems of obesity. Their mission is to lead and drive the global efforts to reduce, prevent and treat obesity.

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