

Social Implications of Food Allergies



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Introduction

Food allergies are a growing problem across the country, as rates and severity of allergies skyrocket in younger populations. Learning how these students are being accommodated in the college setting and the social implications these allergies have for students trying to eat on the Plymouth State University campus is incredibly important for the continued health and safety of this growing number of students on campus.

This particular research set out to find the most common food allergies on the Plymouth State University campus. It also looked to determine if these students feel their dietary needs are being met from the school dining services and take a closer look to see if students with food allergies are violating college dining norms.

Methods

Quantitative research through online questionnaires was the primary method of data collection. Through this method, a larger number of PSU students were reached (n=303). The questionnaires were administered using an online survey tool as students were leaving Prospect dining hall and the Hartman Union Building.



Pictured above is one of the data collection spots. The majority of data collection did occur as students were exiting the Prospect dining hall, but one day was spent administering the questionnaire in the Hartman Union Building, in an attempt to reach the population that is still using Sodexo food services in areas outside of the dining hall.

Findings

Research Question #1: How prevalent are food allergies among the PSU student population?

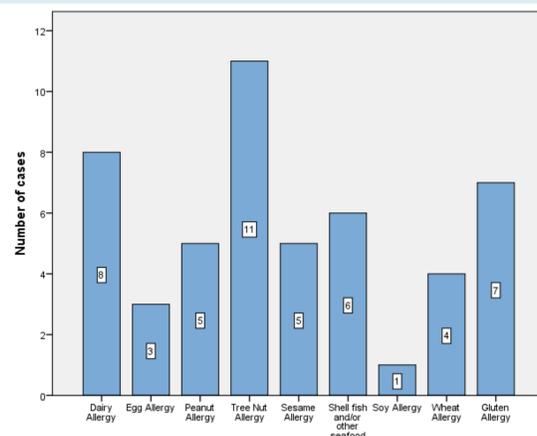
Do you have a food allergy?					
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Yes	40	13.2	13.7	13.7
	No	253	83.8	86.3	100.0
	Total	293	97.0	100.0	
Missing	System	9	3.0		
Total		302	100.0		

Results indicate that 13.7% of the student population has a food allergy, which reinforces the importance of understanding who is being impacted and what the implications are to both individual students and to the campus at large.

Do you avoid certain foods for allergy reasons not medically diagnosed by a doctor?					
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent	
Valid	Yes	18	6.0	7.1	7.1
	No	235	77.8	92.9	100.0
	Total	253	83.8	100.0	
Missing	System	49	16.2		
Total		302	100.0		

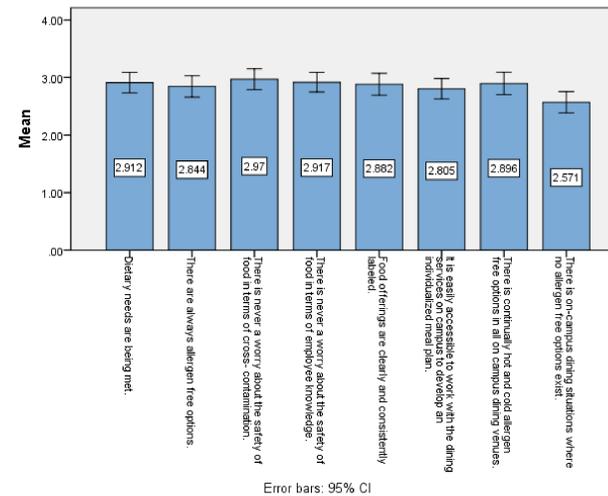
The research also shows that 7.1% of the student population avoid foods for allergy reasons not medically diagnosed, meaning 20.8% of the Plymouth State University student population is looking to avoid specific foods for allergy reasons.

Research Question #2: What are the most common food allergies?



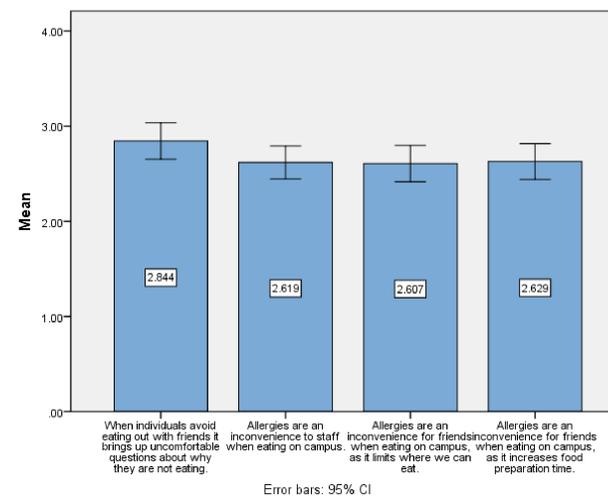
The frequency chart above shows tree nut allergies as the most common allergen in the Plymouth State University student population.

Research Question #3: Do students feel their dietary needs are being met?



In the above chart the lower the mean the higher the level of agreement with the following statements. Taking these values into account, students with food allergies tend to disagree that their dietary needs are being met.

Research Question #4: How do food allergies impact students social lives?



Results show that uncomfortable questions arise for students with food allergies when they avoid eating in on campus dining settings. Although this is a social implications for many students with food allergies, all four factors show a general disagreement with impacts to their social lives.

Conclusions

Research Question #1:

Results indicate that 20.8% percent of students that use on campus dining locations avoid foods for allergy reasons both medically and non medically diagnosed. That number represents a fairly significant portion of the Plymouth State University students that have specialized diets.

Research Question #2:

Tree nuts surpassed all other allergens in frequency. This is particularly concerning as the most fatal reactions occur within individuals between the ages of 17 and 27 who have tree nut allergies ("The information standard, 2011). A number of factors contribute to this high rate but it incredibly important for dining hall staff and students to be aware of the severity of allergic reactions.

Research Question #3:

Results indicate that students with food allergies do not feel that their dietary needs are being met. This would be particularly interesting to school food service providers . When evaluating areas for improvement , focus on education of employees and cross contamination could increase dietary satisfaction of individuals with food allergies.

Research Question #4:

While allergies may cause some uncomfortable social situations, research shows that food allergies do not have a significant impact on students' social lives.

References:

(2011). The information standard, peanut allergy and tree nut allergy- the facts. *Anaphylaxis Campaign*, 1-8. Retrieved from <http://m.anaphylaxis.org.uk/userfiles/files/Peanut Allergy and Tree Nut Allergy Factsheet 2012.pdf>

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