

FOOD INTOLERANCE NETWORK FACTSHEET

Failsafe birthday parties

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Introduction

This factsheet started when a mother wrote: "I am finding birthday parties a problem, even though I have explained the effects of food to my son, he still wants the party food and the dreaded lolly bag and says that it's not fair, any suggestions?"

I've divided the answers into two categories:

- [Part 1: Away](#)
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Failsafe parties can be a positive experience:

"Parents are often amazed at how well behaved kids are at our parties. The kids are calm and have a great time. We enjoy them much more too." - Eleanor

"For the second year in a row I've had parents comment on how happy and calm all children remained. Worth noting that although I had planned party games we didn't bother with them, as all the kids were playing together so well." - Hannah

"For my son's birthdays I make sure all the food is food he can eat. Even if I have to make it myself. He couldn't believe on his last birthday when I told him he could have as much of any of the party food as he wanted. Plus again it helps him to see other people/kids love the stuff he can have and they don't get upset there are no cheezels or corn chips etc." - Natalie

Many thanks to Kylie D, Eleanor, Jenny M, Toni, Kylie M, Kylie P, Natalie, Kim, Jane, Sharon, Ann H and Hannah for their suggestions.

Part 1: AWAY

Kylie D:

For parties I have put failsafe sausage roll, chicken nugget and chips in a take away aluminium tray with lid – I've never had a problem with the party mum putting it in the oven. Party mums have asked me for our recipes so they can do failsafe food as well which has been great.

And the dreaded lolly bag: we trade! We always have a trade box with little toys colour books etc. When we get home they will lay every thing out from the trade box and make their choice. They have a ball and I put the lolly bag in the bin. We have even traded for \$5.

Eleanor:

When my kids go to other parties, I send them with a goodie box of treats that they can choose from while they're at the party. I'll also bring a contribution of potato chips, cupcakes and some other treat for everyone to share. That way, my child can still feel part of the party. Nobody notices that my kids are only eating the stuff I brought.

Kylie M:

Parties are hard until your kids are used to the food. My kids love the failsafe food now and wouldn't go any other way. They do go to other kids' parties & they do slip up occasionally, but for the most part they know what they can and can't have.

Hannah:

My four-year-old understands that she is not allowed to have food that isn't failsafe, either at kindy or at parties. To help her feel comfortable at parties I always make sure I take along plates to share (check with the hostess first, and be aware of possible allergies).

Kylie P:

This is the menu I use when hosting a party and also as items for my children to eat when they go to other children's parties. The idea is to not give these foods too often and to keep them "special" for parties so the kids get excited about them.

- Pancakes with maple syrup or pear jam
- Fairy bread with Nemar natural sprinkles
- Iced buns – I use hotdog rolls from bakers delight and smear white icing sugar made with oiled water.
- Meringues (basically eggwhites and sugar)
- Pizza with garlic butter base and cheese on top ... more in "Home" section

Sharon:

I dread birthday parties! Yesterday we attended two in total contrast to each other. One was fresh fruit and a BBQ breakfast with not a lolly, artificial colour or additive in sight.

The second was a beautiful array of coloured lollies, biscuits and chocolates. I looked for other foods to come out and none did. You can imagine how my heart dropped when miss 6 yrs looks at me with woeful eyes and "but what can I eat Mummy" plead? She drank water for two hours then got her treats at home. Now she is older and is recognising the effects of "grumpy foods" in her diet it is much simpler.

I keep a stash of "happy lollies" at home and she helps me go through the party bag and we do a "trade" grumpy ones for the bin which I then replace with "happy" ones. That seems to work really well. What to do about the table spread? I still suffer badly with that one - especially if I don't know the parent.

Parents I do know are aware and will ask/offer to put out "happy foods" that she can eat. I offer to bring some as well. Parents I don't know - much harder and still haven't solved that one.

Natalie:

I fill my son up before we go to parties by giving him lunch, etc. If possible I try and get him really full then the temptation to eat is greatly reduced. I have been known to give him a sausage or meatballs to eat on the way in the car. I also take approved lollies & chips to the party to give him eat instead of the offered chips, lollies etc. These are usually the regular lollies and chips we have at home. I either put

them into cute little containers or use those small ziplock bags. If using ziplock bags I often take a few as other kids will usually want one to. Or I tell my son to share. It's good that he gets to see that other kids like/want his lollies, so he doesn't feel like he's missing out so much. The other bonus is because I usually have to end up giving my son the more expensive stuff - when he does try the foods/lollies with colours etc in it - he often doesn't like it because the quality is not what he is used to.

Sometimes I just have to wear what he eats at parties but I try to limit it. Or I make a deal - he can have 5 corn chips or twisties or what ever but that's it. The birthday cake I usually have to wear, although if he puts it down I usually make sure it disappears. I would be quite willing to make a small complimentary cake to the party cake that my son could eat (like the one where there was a dog cake and the kid on the restricted diet got a cake in the shape of a bone) but haven't done this as yet. I find that parents who are not on the diet just don't get it. At a recent party someone commented on the colourful cake and said imagine all the E additives in that. The birthday girl's mother said 'Oh no - it's just a packet mix and red food colouring!'

Jenny M:

We have had countless parties this year, and are lucky that our children are not amine reactors.

This is what we take

- container of Smarties (natural colours) mixed with white marshmallows
- small bottles of Schweppes lemonade
- fairy bread with natural coloured sprinkles (Dollar Sweets)
- Kettle chips
- alternative birthday cake - which is the only time they get iced cake - usually a cupcake iced with natural coloured icing (beetroot juice or natural colours e.g. from Hullabaloo foods) or cream cheese frosting
- Or Arnott's teddy bear biscuits (or arrowroot biscuits) coated in icing (white or sometimes coloured, or with sprinkles).

We make up a plate/container of these things and put them on the table along with the other things, but off to the side, usually. We then tell the boys that is their area. These days they are satisfied with that!

Lollypops to share are a winner

We find really a winner is if we make something that the children can share with others if they want to - the lollypops in the Failsafe Cookbook are most often a hit. I usually ask the parents of the party child if it's okay before we come (I usually chat to them anyway about bringing our own food) and then the boys are very excited to crack open their box of lollypops to share with their friends.

Lolly bag

With the lolly bag I usually ask the mum/dad before hand if there are going to be lolly bags (increasingly parents are omitting the lollies from these bags, in our circle of friends and giving things like a balloon and a rubber bouncy ball) and if they wouldn't mind making ones for our boys without lollies and/or we intercept the lolly bag at the giving stage and remove any offending lollies as quickly as possible.

Discussion

I know it's hard and not nice to argue with them, but they have to know that it is for their benefit. We have found explaining to our children WHY we are doing the diet, and citing examples (remember when you ate such and such and you felt so angry and upset for a long time afterwards... that was because you ate xyz... the reason we don't eat this is because they will make you feel the same way). We are lucky that we started our boys on the diet at 4.3 yrs of age, and so they were well aware of

how different they felt on and off diet and during challenges. Our recent sals challenge and subsequent tonsillitis has been a big lesson for our boys! :)

We usually have a discussion on the way to the party that there will be food there that we can't eat, so we must remember to only eat the food Mummy has prepared (it's important, too, that it's not 'every day' food for them - so lots of treats!)

Part 2: HOME

Jane:

I did our first failsafe birthday party recently. I didn't have much time so I kept it simple:

- home-made chicken nuggets
- Woolworths frozen oven fries
- the birthday cake out of Fed Up

The kids loved it!

Toni:

I recently held a joint birthday party for my kids aged 1 and 3 and catered for all the kids food using failsafe ingredients. I was also lucky enough to have good friends offer to make food and they followed the recipes I gave them for failsafe food including honeycomb and fairy bread. You can see in the photos we also had cupcakes with beetroot coloured icing, pastry rings with poppy seeds, kettle plain chips, French fry chips, and short bread biscuits. It was a hit!



Natalie:

A friend of mine whose raised 6 kids on this diet said that when her kids had parties, she never put lollies in the lolly bags (she would put little books, crayons, mini toys, stickers, etc) and she never had a single complaint. She also used to cook fresh hot chips for the kids (she put them into individual cups) at her parties in her deep fryer. The kids thought this was fantastic.

Anne:

For birthday cakes I use an easy icecream recipe:

600ml cream (full fat)

1 tin condensed milk

Beat cream and condensed milk together, half freeze and beat again. Pour mix into cake tin, then freeze until set. I add add grated plain chocolate or choc chips (for non-amine responders) or plain honeycomb. One failsafer used crushed up failsafe lollies. Another alternative is to pour half the mixture into the tin and freeze than add plain cocoa to the other half. Pour gently over - it tastes like a bavarian with NO flavours.

I decorate with plastic candle holders and a toy eg spiderman, astro boy which becomes an extra present. (see photos)

It is so yummy and someone pointed out so high fat - but good for a birthday treat and easier than anything else.



Kylie P:

Here is what we did for my last 2 birthday parties. My children are 5 and 3.

Menu

- Pancakes with maple syrup or pear jam
- Fairy bread with Nemar natural sprinkles
- Iced buns – I use hotdog rolls from bakers delight and smear white icing sugar made with boiled water.
- Meringues [basically eggwhites and sugar]
- Pizza with garlic butter base and cheese on top
- Birthday Cake – I am creative. I use natural colours though my daughter reacts to salicylates so whatever design I do I ensure that there is a lot of white background and my children get the white icing and the visitors can get the natural colours. If this is too hard, do a white cake and smack an additional toy right in the middle. Once children get older – just do the number for their birthday and surround with flowers for a girl or safe lollies for a boy.

I try not to worry about parties. Water to drink or Schweppes natural lemonade. This is exciting because they only get to drink it twice a year (on their birthdays).

Party Bags

We don't give lolly bags put party bags filled with items from the discount store.

All my friends do special lolly bags without lollies for my kids and use stickers or highlighter pens etc.

Discussion

We always talk in our house about how good our food tastes and that colour makes things taste worse. For example I recently made a fire engine cake for my son's 3rd birthday and used the natural colour of yellow for the engine. My daughter helped me ice it. She felt like she was missing out by having to have the white so I asked her to taste a little bit of both. She agreed – white tasted far better and the yellow made it taste yucky.

And just today she complained because she couldn't have strawberry jam anymore. I told her a story about a friend who reacted to eggs. I asked her if she knew what that meant. Straight away she said "He can't eat cake?" I said that is right and she did not complain anymore.

Disappointment is what parents create. It is what it is. When I was a child we never were given lollies, cakes and the ridiculous amount of sugary foods. I don't think we ever complained. Children who are failsafe are simply eating what I ate as a child. Disappointment means that you have succumbed to the marketing of the nasty products. They want your children to feel like they are missing out so they can persuade you to give in. Good luck!

Eleanor:

I love the idea of a birthday party factsheet. Here's what we do.

Lollies

I have a deal with my kids that we swap any lollies they receive at birthday parties (or any other occasion). I always give a good exchange rate, so the kids are motivated to hand the bad stuff in. The only problem is what to do with all the rubbishy stuff afterwards.

Cake

It is easy enough to make a failsafe cake, but the colours are usually plain and dull. I've done rocket cakes with sparkly pipe cleaners, coloured foil and sparklers. Another big success was fresh flowers. Plastic figures also worked well - try pink roses and fairies.

My last cake was for a spooky party. I made a graveyard. It was just a big slab cake with a grave dug out of the middle, carob icing for dirt and some headstones made of wafers. I did cover the graves in grey icing, made with natural blue food colouring. You could easily have white marble ones though too. Some green leaves (strawberry tops or parsley) suggested weeds around the headstones. A wafer coffin with a plastic skeleton completed the look.



Menu

- vanilla birthday cake
- mini meringues
- Princess bread (mix a few drops of cochineal in sugar and sprinkle over buttered bread)
- plain potato chips
- Magic cordial
- home made mini sausage rolls
- hard boiled quail eggs
- safe cookies
- celery sticks with homemade hummus
- egg salad and lettuce sandwiches
- failsafe lollies

Provide colour to the party table with bright plates, napkins, paper flags in cupcakes and flowers scattered everywhere. Nobody will even notice that the food is predominantly beige.

Discussion

Parents are often amazed at how well behaved kids are at our parties. The kids are calm and have a great time. We enjoy them much more too.

Hannah:

My gorgeous four-year-old understands that she is not allowed to have food that isn't failsafe, either at kindy or at parties. To help her feel comfortable at parties I always make sure I take along plates to share (check with the hostess first, and be aware of possible allergies).

We recently hosted our second fully failsafe (and first allergen free) birthday party. The menu was as follows

- Princess Bread (The Failsafe Cookbook, pg 202)
- Marshmallow (The Failsafe Cookbook, pg 173)
- Honeycomb (The Failsafe Cookbook, pg 175)
- Little cakes with white icing (secret family recipe, LOL)
- Kettle plain chips
- Sausage rolls with potato pastry (Friendly Food, RPAH Allergy Unit cookbook)
- F/S sausages with Birgit's pear ketchup (sausages from our wonderful butcher, ketchup from The Failsafe Cookbook, pg 192)

I'd intended on serving Magic Cordial but ran out of time, only one child out of 15 commented on the fact they were drinking water. We made the take home bags up with pencils, bouncy balls and stickers. For the second year in a row I've had parents comment on how happy and calm all children remained. Worth noting that although I had planned party games we didn't bother with them, as all the kids were playing together so well.

When invited to a birthday we take along a bag of Kettle chips, pre-cooked sausages in an insulated bag, fairy princess bread and little cakes with white icing. My daughter has plenty to choose from, and doesn't feel left out. It's also a great idea to have a big feed of healthy food before leaving home so they're not hungry when they arrive. The food part of the party constitutes such a small part of the whole experience. Focus on the games, playing with friends, watching the presents getting unwrapped, giving their present, counting the cards, anything that isn't food related! At the end of the party we bring the lolly bag home, it goes into a container in the fridge and stays there until school holidays, when she's allowed a little blow-out. The only sticking point is the birthday cake, and I can't wait to hear how others deal with that problem. At the last party we attended, she asked for a piece, we said no, but gave her a cup-cake. She accepted it well, but was obviously disappointed. We made sure we got her a present out of our rewards box when we got home, and made a big fuss over the fact that she stuck to her diet without complaining.

Kindy has other children who have anaphylactic allergies to egg, dairy and nuts, so these foods are totally banned. So, I keep a plastic container filled with marshmallow cubes in the freezer, and when treats are brought in for birthdays (invariably air-popped popcorn - one of her biggest triggers) the teacher gets her some marshmallow from the freezer.

My biggest issue is well-meaning adults who (in front of my daughter) make stupid comments about what a shame it is that she misses out, and hopefully she'll grow out of it. I wish they could understand how much work goes into our family making sure she has treats and food that are suitable for her, and that she doesn't miss out!

Kylie M:

We've been failsafe since 2006.

Cake

For the cake we make the Fete Cake every year (using Vienna Cream Frosting or White Icing or whipped cream and we've even used meringue to ice with and then just dress it up differently, this cake we used purple ribbon around the edges and fabric flowers, none touched the actual cake as I had bits of paper behind each one



For my son's cake we put some Matchbox cars on top of, we've also sat little Transformers on top of one.

Drinks

- Iced Water
- Poor Man's Lemonade mixed with Soda Water

Finger Foods

- Sweets
- Scones with Cream
- Pikelets with Nuttalex.
- Margie's lunchbox Muffins
- Marshmallow Slice with caramel filling
- Kettle Chips and Failsafe Hummus to dip in
- Snowballs

Mains

- HFC (page 90) or Shaker Nuggets (p 91)
- Garlic Bread (p 127)
- Failsafe sausages our butcher makes with the Golden Marinade.
- Mini Pizza Bases (p 124) topped with Garlic Meat Topping (p 125)
- Tex Mex Potatoes or Baked Potatoes (p 105)
- Chicken Balls (p 93) (probably double or triple recipe, they go quick)
- Wade's Sausage Rolls (p 46)

Party Bags

It's a bit of extra work but I get the large 1litre Chinese containers from Hot Dollar (1.50 for five) and put the following in & just glue some pictures on them or tie a pretty ribbon around it like a gift for the girls, I have used in the past the cardboard Chinese food boxes from Spotlight (bit more expensive) to put things in as well. (These can be bought decorated -boys or girls- or buy plain and get the kids to decorate).

- Carob Crackles (p182)
- Fairy Cakes dusted with icing sugar
- Dominic's Pop Rocks sealed in a snack size glad bag (p 180)
- Toffee (p 176)
- Rice Bubble Treats (p (174)
- Then I'll also put a tiny packet of colouring pencils, a cheap colouring book (miniature), and party favours, e.g. whistles or the games where you get the ball into the hole etc..... (all very cheap from Hot Dollar)

I do not have balloons or cheap rubber bouncy balls as I have a true latex allergy.

This year my daughter is having a disco party at our local bowling club (she's turning 12) and they have agreed that I can bring in all the food/drinks for our table.

Natalie (for people who can manage amines in chocolate and some salicylates):

I haven't solved all the problems at parties - but I have found ways to make it easier.

I make my own lolly bags up and take them with me. We have a strict rule that lolly bags can't be opened until we are in the car to go home. This usually gives me enough time to do a switch of the lollies I have brought (that are okay - or at least not too bad) with the ones from the party (usually while he is being strapped into his seat). I keep an empty bag (along with my replacement lolly bag in my handbag) to empty the party lollies into and then put my lollies into the party bag. Sometimes if the bags are named, I can do this before they even hand them out. I often find that my lolly bags are better (quality & range) than the ones I am replacing. Once the party lolly bag only had 3 different fluoro red & pink lolly pops in it.

I always keep a lookout for lollies that are different (but okay for my son) from what we would normally have at home and buy them when I see them. My son loves the Lindt white chocolate umbrellas - but they are only available at Christmas time, so I stock up then. I have also ordered from the Little Lolly Shop www.littlelollyshop.com well in advance. I wrap their lollipops in different coloured cellophane & secure with a twist tie and occasionally put a sticker on them. This way they look different from the last lolly bag. David Jones, Darrel Lea and some specialty chocolate shops also have some shaped chocolates (in the form of cows, aeroplanes, pirates, flowers, etc) that are usually okay (apart from the vanilla flavouring). I also put in one or two lollies that my son won't like. This is to help allay suspicion that I might have made it up and also so he realises that he doesn't have to like/eat everything in the lolly bag. He might also end up liking it eventually - so that will give me more options in the future.

I also make up lollies to give more variety. So I will use a large syringe to drizzle dark chocolate over marshmallows (they are called zebras), make my own freckles (from Swiss chocolate and the no artificial colour Nemar sprinkles) in both dark & white chocolate. They can look pretty special when made in larger than average sizes. My son has to have large doses of amines for 4 days consecutively before his asthma reacts. So chocolate is okay as long as it is not in large quantities and I limit his cheese and banana intake around the time of parties. I get Lindt or Belgian chocolate pieces from David Jones with no additives (they also have white and it's not too expensive in small quantities) apart from some vanilla flavouring. They also have 3D cat, owl, opera house & bridge shapes made with the same chocolate in white, brown & marbled varieties. Unsalted pretzels can be dipped in dark chocolate (I use the stuff from David Jones or the Cadbury dark cooking drops) and sprinkled with the aforementioned Nemar's sprinkles. If you can find unsalted stick pretzels you can just dip the end in chocolate or melted marshmallow and then in the sprinkles and you have magic wands. You can also

take an otherwise plain lolly like the Werther's caramels & wrap them different coloured papers/foils /cellophane, add stickers if you wish. I have also made chocolate crackles - just Belgian chocolate and rice bubbles - sensational and they are much less sickly and fattening made this way without the copha. I have also made chocolate spiderwebs (he is a spiderman fan) with chocolate and a large syringe (they are very fragile though) you can make a spider out of a smartie & some more chocolate if you are feeling especially creative. I haven't done it yet but have been thinking about making (or buying) small biscuits, melting marshmallow (or using soft meringue) to sandwich them together and putting a pop stick in the middle - a bit like a lollipop. You could decorate the outside with lollies to look like faces, robots etc. I have also considered making my own dollar sweets (the straight coloured sprinkles on cakes) as they are just royal icing with colour piped through a thin syringe/piping nozzle. it would be labour intensive but they do last ages and it would add more variety.

I keep a stash of these lollies, chocolates, little toys and different types of lolly bags/boxes on hand so that I can make up a bag at a moments notice. The different bags are in case I can do a straight swap or for when the party bag isn't very appealing or I don't have time to switch contents of the bags. I have found that the bag itself is part of the appeal. I once gave my son plain popcorn (not failsafe-salicylates) in a mini party box (with a fold down lid) and he was so excited about it that he ate most of it before we even got to the movie.

For my son's birthdays I make sure all the food is food he can eat. Even if I have to make it myself. He couldn't believe on his last birthday when I told him he could have as much of any of the party food as he wanted. Plus again it helps him to see other people/kids love the stuff he can have and they don't get upset there are no cheezels or corn chips etc.

The other thing I have done from the very start of this diet is every time we went to hospital or my son got sick or woke up with growing pains in his legs or bad dreams I would reinforce that it was because he ate devon or something with preservatives or bad colours, etc. If I could relate it to the exact foodstuff I would. If not I would pick something I was having a hard time getting him to stop eating. If there was another kid screaming or sick at the hospital I would tell him it was because they had eaten something else not allowed on the diet or swallowed toothpaste. It's not always easy to think of this in the middle of the night when your son is screaming with leg pain etc but the connection is now in his mind between certain foods and pain/being sick. This makes it a bit easier to keep him away from the bad foods.

I also send small cakes or patty cakes to preschool and these I decorate to look like faces, butterflies, etc. I have even used chocolate to draw robots on the top and used lollies, busted smarties to decorate. Sometimes I make the decoration 3D so I cut a shape out of royal icing or chocolate and stand it at an angle on the patty cake. Often I am sure what he has looks better than the actual birthday cake - but this stops him feeling like he is missing out.

My husband thinks I go to too much effort and expense but I think it is worth it to keep him happy on the diet and so that he can enjoy lolly bags as I did as a kid!

Pippa: Exciting star cake icing hint



We had our son's 2nd birthday party last week and I was struggling with a way to ice his cake in a failsafe, but exciting way. In the end, we made carob cake and I used a tea strainer to sprinkle icing sugar all over the cake. I then dipped 2 different sized star cookie cutters in a bit of water and pressed them into the cake. The water dissolved the icing sugar and left star shapes all over the cake. You could do the same using a carob and icing sugar mix over a light coloured cake. The result was an impressive looking effect that had the kids wanting the star cake over the non-fail safe cake with green icing and flowers I had made for his cousin who was also turning two!!

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The information given is not intended as medical advice. Always consult with your doctor for underlying illness. Before beginning dietary investigation, consult a dietician with an interest in food intolerance. You can find a supportive dietitian through the Dietitians Association of Australia www.daa.asn.au or write for our list of supportive dietitians (confoodnet@ozemail.com.au)

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