



A business that helps people on special diets

It was a shock to the system for Kay Harrison, going from reviewing restaurants to not being able to eat in them. Before moving to Howden, part of her job involved dining out across London and writing up food reviews for a newspaper – but that all changed when she was diagnosed with coeliac disease, an auto-immune condition where gluten causes the body to attack itself.

Mum-of-one Kay said: “So, basically, every time I ate bread, cake or pasta, my intestines were taking a battering and could not do their job and absorb nutrients into my body. I was anaemic, exhausted and unwell. The only treatment is sticking to a strict gluten-free diet. Back when I was diagnosed, finding gluten-free options was a nightmare.”

But Kay has found a positive out of her condition by teaming up with her best friend to launch The Safer Eating Company – a business that helps people

on special diets, whether they are coeliacs, have food allergies and intolerances, are vegans or vegetarians or are simply cutting out food groups for a healthier lifestyle.

Kay, 36, says: “Strangely enough, my best friend from school, Karen Woodford, was diagnosed with coeliac disease a few years after me. But she also has problems with lactose and fructose.

“It was a complete nightmare whenever we ate out. A lot of the time, the staff

would not have a clue so we ended up having a basic baked potato while everyone else was having fabulous meals. Or we’d order something that we thought was safe to eat, but it would make us ill. We just gave up in the end as we felt we didn’t know anywhere we could trust.

“Karen is a speech therapist in Leeds with lots of links to dietitians and clever foodie types so she was really keen to do some good and start educating people. And so we could both start eating out again!”

The website www.safereating.co.uk gives lots of helpful advice on the 14 common allergens, including milk, nuts, eggs and gluten, as well as blogs, recipes, a forum and a map to find safe places to dine out.

Kay says: “We are aimed at people who are on special diets and also the businesses that serve them. Karen does training, too.

“We’re building up a database of restaurants, cafés and pubs nationwide that we know we can trust that serve great free-from options. It’s free for businesses to sign up – they just have to answer a few questions online. People can nominate

places they love, too, but we only add them to our Safer Eating map after we’ve checked they know their stuff.

“It makes sense for businesses to really know this stuff. We are a very loyal bunch – when we know we can trust a place, we will keep on returning”

“Drewton’s in South Cave is on the map – the café and shop is great. I wish I could be locked in there. They do amazing gluten-free white chocolate and beetroot cake. And gluten-free chips – I can’t normally have them, as chips are often cooked in the same fryer as things with batter, so they get contaminated. Being

coeliac, you come to really appreciate the simple pleasure of eating chips.”

One in 100 people has coeliac disease, with many more having gluten intolerances and avoiding it for health reasons.

Kay says: “When I was diagnosed eight years ago, no one seemed to know much about gluten and intolerances and free-from. Now people are getting wiser – both Co-ops in Howden have a free-from shelf and the Flourish and Prosper deli sells gluten-free beer. The King’s Head pub in Barmby was even selling gluten-free beer on tap the other day.

“More and more people are avoiding certain types of food, for all kinds of reasons. A friend of mine in Howden recently discovered her one-year-old son suffers from several food allergies and it has been a real eye-opener for her – how a little bit of egg or wheat can make her child so ill, unhappy and uncomfortable.”

Safer Eating has also launched an eLearning course that businesses can take to get them clued-up on allergies, cross-contamination and the law. It takes 45

minutes to complete and gives employees an overall awareness of any issues that could make customers unwell. There is also a Safer Eating training folder that staff can refer to, to keep kitchens safe and customers reassured. They also sell posters and stickers to flag-up cross-contamination issues.

“Cross-contamination – when free-from food gets contaminated by other food – is a big thing and we want to get the message out there,” Kay says. “There have been times when you see people using the same spoons to serve free-from meals that have been used for other things. That alone can make people sick but a lot of people don’t realise. The website has loads of tips – something as simple as having sauces in squeeze bottles so contaminated knives don’t end up in them.

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The Safer Eating eLearning course costs £19.99. Visit www.safereating.co.uk