

Nut Allergy Labelling
Report of Research into the Consumer Response

During the course of the interviews numerous phrases were used to describe the labelling or warning of possible nut traces contamination. For greater clarity we have used the phrase NTC warning throughout.

This report represents a snapshot of events at the time the research was undertaken. It should be remembered that it was not a comprehensive review of all Nut Trace Contamination labelling.

The views expressed in this report are those of the people who took part in the work and of the researchers and they do not necessarily reflect the views of the Food Standards Agency.

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

Creative Research was commissioned to conduct qualitative research to explore the response of consumers to nut allergy labelling on pre-packed foods. This was to include their understanding of the various forms of nut trace contamination (NTC) warning currently in use, the value they attach to these warnings and their attitude to the different styles of presentation. These views were used to provide advice on the development of new labelling.

1.2 Method

Twenty-one depth interviews were carried out with people who have an allergy to nuts along with, in the majority of cases, their parent or partner who regularly shops on their behalf. In addition, three discussion groups of 6 respondents were conducted with people who occasionally shop on behalf of somebody with a nut allergy.

1.3 Outcome

A range of approaches were identified to the decision making process taken to determine the level of risk respondents were prepared to take when choosing which food products to buy. There were a number of respondents who avoided all contact with nuts however remote the likelihood of exposure ('total avoidance'). A few consumers exhibited 'occasional lapses' from a total avoidance regime but the majority took 'calculated risks' when deciding whether to eat foods that may be contaminated with nuts.

Respondents based their calculations on their perception of factors such as the status of their allergy (severity and range of nuts), how secure they felt (who they were with, where they were and whether they had their medication), and their state of health.

In making decisions about food purchasing and consumption, respondents relied heavily on the labelling of products because this was perceived as the most up to date source of information. In addition, respondents were unaware of other sources of information.

Particular products such as cakes, biscuits, ice cream and lollies, breakfast cereals, ready meals and desserts, were identified as those where nut content/contamination was a particular issue (although respondents also discussed skin and hair care products).

A significant issue for those respondents using food labels to find information about possible nut content was changes or inconsistencies in the use of warning.

The ease with which people could shop for someone with a nut allergy depended on two main factors; the number of products in the shop that carried some form of NTC warning, and the ease of identifying the NTC warning. In some shops, respondents felt that

- a) NTC warnings appeared on so many of the products that it acted as a deterrent in terms of shopping and
- b) the value of the NTC warning became diluted.

Respondents sought two pieces of information from the label of the product, the NTC warning and the list of ingredients. Most respondents were critical of the way such information had been presented. The principal complaints were the variability in the form of phrases used to highlight nut content, the position of the NTC warning on the pack (neither prominent enough nor consistent) and the legibility of the NTC warning due to font size and lack of visual impact.

The NTC warnings which respondents recalled most frequently were; *'not suitable for nut allergy sufferers'*, *'may contain nuts/nut traces'* and *'produced in a factory using nuts'*. Many respondents (particularly those shopping occasionally) were uncertain as to what these phrases meant for the person with a nut allergy. The equivocal nature of the phrases had been universally resented by respondents and was seen as an insurance policy for manufacturers.

While respondents were able to assign a hierarchy of risk that they associated with various NTC warnings, their reported behavior in response to such warnings fell into two main groups. Either respondents interpreted all NTC warnings as suggesting there was a real risk, and therefore they should not eat those foods, or they interpreted all NTC warnings as a suggestion of a possible risk, and therefore should be look in more detail at the pack. The first approach characterised the 'total avoiders' and occasional shoppers (who would not wish to knowingly take a risk on someone else's behalf) while the second characterised the 'calculated risk takers'.

Respondents had different views on what changes should be made to improve NTC warnings. The 'total avoiders' and occasional shoppers, in particular, wanted either a negative *'this is not suitable for nut allergy sufferers because it contains nuts (or a specific nut)'* or a positive *'this product does not contain nuts'* or *'this product is nut-free'*. This group wanted the manufacturers to take the responsibility for deciding which products are suitable for the consumer with a nut allergy.

By contrast, the ‘calculated risk taker’, who were generally more accustomed to taking decisions about what they ate, wanted more meaningful information on the label to enable them to make their own choices with confidence. The information the ‘calculated risk taker’ would like included on the label were the probability and level of nut contamination, the type of nut, and greater discrimination in the application of NTC warnings.

1.4 Conclusions

Respondents gave widespread support for:

- greater standardisation in the information provided on the label and the style of presentation
- a symbol as the “primary, or first line, alert”. This should be placed in a prominent and consistent position
- greater visibility for the three key pieces of information; symbol, NTC warning and ingredient list with a consistent relationship with regard to positioning between all three elements.

A series of recommendations based on these findings were made to increase the usefulness of labelling for those with an allergy to nuts and their families. These included:

- a universal approach to NTC warnings, not just limited to foodstuffs but across other products containing nuts or nut derivatives
- an approach that is adopted by other forms of NTC warning such as on menus and signs in shops/restaurants/takeaways
- simpler, more informative descriptions of the level of nut content/contamination eg. *‘this product contains nuts’*, *‘this product contains ingredients derived from nuts’*, *‘product made on same production line as products containing nuts’* and *‘products made in a factory where nuts are handled’* with the relevant ingredients (and specific nuts) in the ingredient list
- a symbol or graphic device which unambiguously signals a NTC warning – based possibly on a nut shape (though not too specific) or the word *‘nut’* or *‘nuts’*. If incorporating a statement, this should take a form such as *‘Take care – Nuts’*, ie. leave the consumer to decide about suitability if they wish. The phrase *‘nut allergy suffer’* was generally disliked, *‘not suitable for people with nut allergies’* was preferred
- ideally, the symbol should appear on the front face of the pack but wherever it appears, it should be in a consistent position
- on the reverse of the pack, the symbol should be positioned next to the NTC warning to direct attention
- the NTC warning should appear next to, but separate from, the ingredient list, possibly above it, or to the left
- ‘Allergy Advice’ could be used as a “banner” to flag up the NTC warning; the advise about nuts should take priority over other allergens

- the key elements should stand out from the pack; it may be necessary to have a panel behind the elements if the background colour does not provide a good contrast
- the same colour should be used for the symbol and the NTC warning and possibly to highlight items in the ingredient list which are nuts or nut derivatives
- the font size used for the NTC warning and ingredient list should ensure legibility for most people without the need for spectacles. A mix of lower and upper case characters should be used.

A significant campaign will be needed to inform those with a nut allergy, their families and friends, about any new scheme for nut labelling. The role of retailers as a conduit for information and in highlighting nut-free products is particularly important.

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2 Introduction

2.1 Background

The Board of the Food Standards Agency has an 18-point action plan on food labelling. In response to consumer concerns that nut trace contamination (NTC) warnings were confusing, the action plan contained two points on this issue:

- to work with the industry and public interest groups to reduce the use of “may contain nut traces” labels, and
- to work with industry and public interest groups to provide clear advice to consumers on the reasons behind the use of these NTC warnings and what they mean.

In 2001 the Anaphylaxis Campaign (AC) were commissioned to investigate the prevalence of NTC warnings, the different formats of NTC warnings used and report on current practice. They found a variety of symbols and wide range of NTC warnings currently in use, ranging from ‘*May Contain Nuts*’ to ‘*This product has been made in a production area that uses nuts*’.

In addition, the Food Standards Agency commissioned this qualitative research to establish the consumer perceptions about the range of NTC warnings and which, if any, of the existing NTC warnings could provide a generic template to be used when establishing future guidelines.

2.2 Research Objectives

The aim of this research was to inform discussions on guidelines for NTC warning design for products that contain nuts/may have been contaminated by nut traces.

The research specifically set out to address the following:

- What consumers understood from the NTC warnings currently in use
- How much value they attached to the NTC warnings
- Which NTC warnings were the easiest to understand
- If there was a preference for a written NTC warning or a logo to indicate the inclusion of/contamination with nuts in products
- Response to the design elements used in the NTC warnings, including typeface, logo, use of colours, positioning on package.
- Sources used by consumers and ease of finding information.

Finally, the brief asked for guidance on the development of new NTC warnings if consumers felt they were necessary.

2.3 Research Method

The research was qualitative in nature so that the issues around understanding and use of NTC warnings could be explored in depth and ideas developed for taking the NTC warning content and design forward.

A mix of depth interviews with people with a nut allergy, either by themselves or more often with a parent or partner, who shopped for them on a **regular** basis, was carried out. In addition, three group discussions with people who shopped for a friend or family member with a nut allergy on an **occasional** basis were conducted. The research was carried out in five locations, in the environs of Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Edinburgh and London.

In each of these city areas, depth interviews were conducted as follows:

- 2 paired depths with children who suffer from a nut allergy and the parent who does the main shopping for the family. These were split as follows:
 - one younger child (8-12 years)
 - one older child (13-17 years).

All were involved to some extent in looking at the food labels, either when shopping with their parents or by themselves.

- 1 paired depth with an adult (over 18 years) with a nut allergy and the person in their household who did (or shared) the main shopping (parent or partner).
- 1 individual depth with an adult sufferer who shopped for him/herself.

In addition, three mini-group (6 respondents in each) discussions were conducted with people who occasionally shop on behalf of someone with a nut allergy. The mini-groups were carried out in Belfast, Edinburgh and London. The people, on whose behalf they shopped included grandchildren, adult offspring living away from home, siblings, adult friends and friends of children.

The discussions with individuals or pairs of respondents were conducted in their own homes to allow access to food packaging from their own cupboards/refrigerators to illustrate their buying habits and views. The mini-groups were held in the recruiter's home but participants were asked to bring with them any food packaging they wished to refer to during the discussions about buying for someone with a nut allergy.

In addition, those taking part in the individual and paired depth discussions were asked to keep a diary of incidents which arose from their allergy to nuts that occurred in the time (usually about a week) between recruitment and the interview. This had not always been possible because some respondents were recruited shortly before the interviews but several diaries were brought along.

The interviews lasted between 1 and 1½ hours and the group discussions were 1½ hours in length. The research was conducted between 8 and 21 May 2002.

Copies of the recruitment questionnaires are available upon request to the Food Standards Agency.

2.4 Observations on the Sample

Some key characteristics about the sample are given below. These should not be interpreted as reflecting the characteristics of everyone with a nut allergy.

- Two-thirds of the sample were female
- The full range of socio-economic groups were represented
- Almost all respondents could trace the ‘appearance’ of their nut allergy to childhood; although their allergy may not have been formally diagnosed at that stage
- A third of the sample had not been formally tested to determine the severity of their allergy but had either self-diagnosed or been advised by their GP
- Over half those sampled had experienced an anaphylactic type of reaction to nuts and several had experienced full anaphylactic shock
- Approximately two-thirds of respondents carried adrenaline in the form of an epipen
- The majority of respondents suffered from other atopic conditions such as asthma, hay fever and eczema
- About half of the respondents specified other food allergens. These included gluten, some fruit and vegetables, eggs, dairy products, pulses and soya. Some respondents also listed penicillin
- Many respondents perceived they were allergic to all nuts, although they may have had a greater intolerance to one or more specific nuts. These were variously, peanuts, Brazil nuts, cashew nuts and walnuts. Only two respondents were only allergic to nuts other than peanuts.

2.5 Discussion Content

The general flow of the discussion is set out below.

- Experience of having a nut allergy and its effect on an individual’s lifestyle or the lifestyle of the family member or friend. This included catering for people with nut allergies
- Patterns of shopping and behavior with respect to selection of products
- Information required for decisions about whether to buy/consume
- Ease of finding information about both allergy and labelling practices
- Response to the information provided on the labels of pre-packed foods and perceptions of risk
- Awareness of different approaches to NTC warnings

- Response to a range of NTC warnings (shown as statements on cards)
- Response to different approaches to NTC warnings (shown as packs from products in the prepared meals, biscuits, cereals and confectionery categories)
- Ideas for improving NTC warnings
- Any other ways in which those with a nut allergy could be supported.

2.6 Structure of the Report

The conclusions (based on the findings of the research) together with recommendations for taking discussions about NTC warnings forward are described in the next section. These are suggestions based on the researchers understanding of consumer needs rather than a full picture of the debate.

Appendix 1 reports on the impact of having a nut allergy and the impact on those who live with them or cater for them occasionally. This includes their attitudes to the risks they face and the ways in which they cope with the allergy.

Appendix 2 covers shopping behavior and what it entails to shop for someone with a nut allergy. This includes the information people use when shopping and the sort of information they are seeking.

Appendix 3 focuses on actual NTC warnings; awareness of the forms of NTC labels, response to a range of NTC labels and existing designs of the NTC label.

Appendix 4 pulls together the improvements that respondents believe are necessary with respect to NTC warnings for consumers with a nut allergy.

Appendix 5 looks at some other suggestions for various ways in which greater support could be given to people with a nut allergy and their friends and family.

Finally, Appendix 6, is a glossary of terms.

3 Conclusions and Recommendations

3.1 Conclusions

3.1.1 Current Methods of Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

This research found that for those with a nut allergy, NTC warnings has not worked well and did not serve their needs.

This research also found that there were many different phrases in use for NTC warnings and they offer little real guidance on the level of risk. Most of the NTC warnings did not stand out on packaging and could not be easily identified. The multiplicity of styles of presentation exacerbated the problem.

NTC warnings about possible nut contamination were strongly resented. It was widely believed that manufacturers were failing to take proper measures when processing foodstuffs and that NTC warnings were there mainly to protect manufacturers.

3.1.2 The Consumer

Consumers with a nut allergy do not form a homogeneous group. Their age, the nature of their allergy (specificity and severity), the method and location of their diagnosis, all have an impact on their approach to dealing with their allergy. We have characterised their approaches as total avoidance, occasional lapses and calculated risk taking, with the majority of our sample adopting the last approach. Moreover, it was not only the person with the allergy who adopted this approach. Those who shopped on their behalf, either regularly or occasionally, also did so.

Different ways of coping with a nut allergy influenced how consumers responded to NTC warnings and also determined how they would like the NTC warnings to be developed. This research shows that those who set out to avoid all nuts, however insignificant the trace, interpret all NTC warnings as an indication of a real risk. They reject all products carrying any form of NTC warning. This research suggested that 'total avoiders' would like to see two forms of NTC warnings – '*contains nuts*' and '*nut free*'. This would in effect guide them to '*no, you shouldn't try this*' or '*yes, you can try this*'. Those who shop occasionally on behalf of people with a nut allergy also favour this approach.

However, a number of people with a nut allergy were willing to take a risk with what they eat. This research shows that a number of factors, other than the warning, can influence people with nut allergy to try a product even though it has a NTC warning. These factors include state of mind, state of health, perceived safety of their situation and so on. However, to enable them to make an appropriate decision and take responsibility for

their actions they needed to understand the real risk associated with the NTC warning.

‘Calculated risk takers’ did not consider NTC warnings (except those which state ‘contains nuts’), as reflecting different levels of risk. Calculated risk takers therefore tended to treat all products with NTC warnings in the same way, as a trigger to look in more detail at the ingredient list. If no nuts were present in the ingredient list, other factors determine whether they choose to take the risk of eating the product. ‘Calculated risk takers’ would like to see a standard range of NTC warnings that have real meaning which help them in decision making. Standard labels would also help members of the families of those taking a ‘total avoidance’ line.

Some ‘risk takers’ expressed the view that a graded approach could be used to indicate the level of risk (along the lines of the chilli peppers used to suggest the varying ‘hotness’ of curries). While superficially appealing for its simplicity, several of the respondents identified the problems inherent in this approach and many of the findings of this research supported their view. Such a system would be unreliable, not only from the point of view of the difficulty of ensuring that all manufacturers used the same thresholds for nut contamination, but also from the standpoint of the consumer whose allergy can vary in severity and nature over time.

3.2 Recommendations

- a) A universal approach should be taken to NTC warnings, not only across foodstuffs but also on consumer products such as toiletries. Any such labelling would need to express the nut ingredients in English rather than Latin.
- b) The approach taken to NTC warnings on pre-packed foods should be mirrored or complemented by restaurant menus and on signs in shops and takeaways. Consumers should be able to recognise the same allergy awareness ‘scheme’ in operation in order to become familiar with it.
- c) In taking steps to improve NTC warnings, the needs of both those adopting a total avoidance approach and those prepared to take risks should be taken into account.
- d) There were three elements that should be considered in any allergy awareness ‘scheme’. Firstly, there was a clear need for a symbol to alert the consumer to nut content or possible contamination. This should be sufficient for those practicing a total avoidance approach. Secondly, there was a need for a series of standardised NTC warnings and thirdly, the ingredient list should be considered in combination with the NTC warning. We look at each of these below.

3.2.1 Symbol

A new symbol, which unambiguously signals a NTC warning, should be introduced. Some respondents suggested an image of a nut; the question is, which nut? For instance, the peanut has a distinct and well-recognised shape but it may be interpreted as indicating peanuts alone rather than all nuts. It may be worth exploring the design alongside an approach that is centered on the word 'Nut' or 'Nuts'.

If a word approach is explored rather than telling consumers that the product is *'not suitable for people with a nut allergy'*, it may be advisable to offer personal choice. An alert such as *'Take care – Nuts'* formed into a distinctive shape could satisfy the needs of both those who see the symbol as the cut-off point and those who see it as a direction to look further.

A well-known alert symbol (such as the red triangle) could be incorporated into the label, particularly if a graphic symbol of a nut were used.

3.2.2 Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

There was a clear need for discussion about the policy and practice of the industry with respect to ensuring pre-packed foods remain free from cross-contamination. Choices in certain product areas for consumers with a nut allergy have become markedly reduced as manufacturers increasingly place NTC warnings on pre-packed foods.

Assuming the risk of contamination due to industry practices are unlikely to be reduced, there should be a clear definition of the range of circumstances in which nuts may be present.

Whichever phrases are agreed upon it will be necessary to inform consumers about their meaning.

The research shows that shopping for someone with a nut allergy would be made easier if nut-free products were clearly labeled as such. One suggestion was that each product be assessed for its eligibility for nut-free status and labeled accordingly. This approach had appeal but could make matters worse as products without a NTC warning or nut-free symbol could cause even more uncertainty.

Other, simpler recommendations regarding the content of NTC warnings were as follows:

- specify the type of nut, wherever possible
- use an 'Allergy Advice' banner to signal the possible presence of nuts and other allergens.

3.2.3 Positioning of the Elements and Design Features

Most of the respondents who were allergic to nuts, or regularly shopped for someone with a nut allergy, did not think that it was essential for the symbol to appear on the front of the pack. However, it would help if the symbol was in a reasonably consistent position.

The NTC warning should appear next to, but should be separate from, the list of ingredients. It could appear above the ingredient list or to the left to reflect the direction of reading. Flaps or ends of the pack where NTC warnings may be obscured by hands should be avoided.

It was considered crucial that all elements stand out from the background colour of the pack which may necessitate the use of lighter panels behind the print. Many respondents felt that the colour red could be adopted for the symbol, this may require the background to be a lighter colour.

It is suggested that linking the symbol and NTC warning further through the use of the same colour (Marks and Spencer has already done this). This same colour could also be used to highlight items in the ingredient list, which were nuts or derivatives of nuts.

The use of an allergy banner, such as 'Allergy Advice', had been well supported by respondents. This would need to stand out, perhaps with the use of colour reversing.

A minimum font size should be specified for both the NTC warnings and the ingredient list. However, this would be difficult to specify since legibility was very dependent on contrast with the background, font size and spacing. Most shoppers should be able to read this information without the aid of spectacles.

A mix of upper and lower case print should be used to help with ease of reading. Upper case should also be considered for the symbol and/or the banner as the main function of these labels is to attract the eye.

3.3 Communication of the New Approach

A significant information dissemination campaign would be necessary if a new scheme was launched. Given the size of the target audience an "above the line"¹ campaign might not be cost-effective. However, it should be borne in mind that the target was not only the individual with a nut allergy but also those in their immediate family and wider social circle.

¹ This is a reference to advertising using media such as TV, radio, poster and press (as opposed to below the line which refers to direct mail, for example)

More focused dissemination could be achieved through editorials in womens' magazines and the health and fitness section of daily newspapers. In addition a shared campaign (posters, leaflets etc) could be promoted in-store with the help of the British Retail Consortium and retailers, this would demonstrate a commitment to working together for a common standard to help all consumers affected by a nut allergy.

Point of sale information would be vital and retailers might differ in how far they would wish to promote this. The idea of a nut-free zone was very attractive to consumers but it might be impractical. However, nut-free products could be highlighted on the shelf edge. In addition, there should also be improved information about the location of nut free products.

There was a real need for leaflets, primarily to explain any new scheme, what it means and how consumers could make use of it. It could also be used to provide broader information, for example:

- how to obtain detailed information about the content of products
- the wider use of the scheme by restaurants, takeaways and so on
- basic information about nut allergies and the need for proper diagnosis/diagnostic review
- other sources of information and support e.g. the Anaphylaxis Campaign, the British Allergy Foundation and the British Nutrition Foundation.

In terms of the leaflet, or any other form of communication, consideration should be given to use of the term, '*people with an allergy to nuts*' or similar, rather than '*nut allergy sufferers*'. This was proposed on the basis, not only on the point raised by the respondents, but also on the basis of findings from previous government research that showed dissatisfaction among 'campaigning' disability groups with such terms as '*sufferer*'.

Appendix 1: Living with a Nut Allergy

A1.1 Introduction

This Appendix looks at ways in which people's lives have been affected by an allergy to nuts and the ways in which they coped from day to day with the condition. This sets the scene and provides a context in which to evaluate their perceptions of NTC warnings and the improvements that are required.

There had been a feeling amongst respondents that allergies in general, but nut allergies in particular, had become more common and therefore there was a need to take the issue more seriously. Several respondents were aware of a few children in their own child's school who were also affected:

*"I think they should invest a bit more money into making labelling specific and accurate, rather than a general warning, because it is becoming much more of a widespread problem, you know, it is not 1 in a 100 anymore. I mean, I know of three or four boys and girls that, you know... so it is a growing problem."
(Mother of child with nut allergy)*

Most of the respondents had become accustomed to coping with their own nut allergy, or that of their child, over several years and seemed almost to take their pattern of behavior for granted. Changes were more acutely felt if diagnosis had been more recent.

Although several felt that they would not like to be 'starting out' now in terms of dealing with the condition because it seemed more confusing in some ways, others felt that awareness and understanding of allergy issues in shops, restaurants etc had increased.

A1.2 Effects on Lifestyle

A1.2.1 Diet

Respondents with a nut allergy felt more secure eating at home because of the greater control it gave them over what they ate. They preferred to prepare meals from scratch, using basic ingredients, rather than eating pre-cooked or pre-packaged meals or using ready made cooking sauces. Pasta, jacket potatoes, plain meat, vegetables and fruit were common main meals:

*"Usually I make stuff fresh rather than buying in packets."
(Woman with nut allergy)*

*"At least that way I know what I am eating and I don't have to worry."
(Young woman with nut allergy)*

Many pre-packed biscuits and cakes were excluded from the diet because of possible nut contamination; consequently there was a high incidence of home baking.

As a result the impression of a healthier, if rather restricted diet, was gained. Pre-packed biscuits, cakes and sweets were eaten by some; however, these were usually the same brands, and tended to be the very plain varieties.

Two mothers illustrated how children could build up barriers to particular foods because of their perception of possible risk. In one case, the child found 'nutty' textures off-putting to the extent that he was over cautious about trying new foods. In the other case, the introduction of NTC warnings on hitherto 'safe' foods had made her daughter overanxious about her diet:

Case 1 "He is much happier with something soft and if it is anything that requires chewing and it is crunchy I think it is a bit of a barrier for him and he is trying to overcome it. But it is so instilled into you. I think psychologically he is very nervous about textured foods anyway." (Parent of a child with nut allergy)

Case 2 "We had a really bad 6 months with Anna about three or four years ago after they changed the packaging on a lot of foods that had once been safe foods. It really affected her to the point where she would hardly eat anything and questioned everything I gave her. I know it really made her feel suddenly very frightened whereas before, she felt okay. That's when Anna stopped eating anywhere but home." (Mother of child with nut allergy)

A1.2.2 Eating Out in Restaurants

Eating out posed a problem for many of the respondents with some feeling this had been the most difficult aspect of their condition. Several respondents highlighted the 'fact' that deaths have occurred in restaurants and although they acknowledged that the numbers of deaths were very low, this clearly influenced how they felt about eating out. Indeed, a small number had suffered an adverse reaction from eating out in a restaurant even after discussing their needs with caterers:

"The only time I'm ever careful or wary of what I'm eating is if I go to a Chinese because of the way they clean the wok.

We had varied starters to share and there were some chicken pieces and I looked at the sauce. It was red so I thought it was sweet and sour or a barbecue one, so I bit one and it was satay. And I panicked. My friend who had ordered had said 'make sure there's nothing with satay'. But they had made a mistake and just brought it out straightaway." (Woman with nut allergy)

Even after consulting staff and keeping to their recommendations, problems had still arisen, although these had not been life-threatening in nature. This incident occurred in the few days before the interview:

“Visited a local restaurant with family. Consulted staff for advice about which food would be safest for me. I chose a plain meal – steak, potatoes and veg. and was assured that this should be okay. Unfortunately my throat became quite irritated. Staff were not sure what caused this. We put it down to the butter it was cooked in, as it contained herbs, spices and possible nut extract.”
(Diary of young woman with nut allergy)

Once a reaction had been experienced when eating out, it often took some time to find the confidence to try again. Those with a nut allergy were not in control of the preparation of the food so have to trust staff to know exactly what the ingredients or the substances used in cooking were. Respondents felt more vulnerable when away from home in case they had to deal with a reaction in less familiar surroundings. For those with a severe allergy to nuts this meant rarely eating out in restaurants:

“I don’t eat out. It’s a very rare occasion I eat out because I am concerned that something may have been contaminated or, you know, or a knife used to chop nuts and then it is used to cut up something that I’m going to eat.” (Woman with nut allergy)

If respondents did eat out they tended to visit restaurants they were accustomed to or had knowledge of:

“Even when I go out, I order the same foods. We only go to the Italian restaurant now and I order the same foods because I know what’s in it and I don’t need to worry.” (Young woman with nut allergy)

Many respondents said that they tended to stay away from Indian, Chinese or Thai restaurants as they were more likely to include nuts in their dishes, which sometimes would not be obvious from the menu description or upon visual inspection:

“It’s awkward when I go out in groups. I mean, for instance, a lot of my friends like Chinese food and I won’t go because I am worried about what is in the ingredients.” (Young woman with nut allergy)

The recent arrival of ‘fast’ sushi bars raised concerns because the food moved around on a conveyor and carried no detailed information about content.

The need to question waiters about the content of food also presented a barrier to eating out. Several of the respondents clearly found it difficult to be assertive especially when they had to be persistent in their requests for information. While most restaurants tried to be helpful,

respondents had been concerned that some restaurant staff might not take the issue seriously or be off-hand:

“I asked them has it (stuffed vine leaves) got nuts in it? And she said it hadn’t. I said, ‘can you double check with the chef just in case?’ And she said she would. She got a bit annoyed because I kept asking her. And she came back and said ‘yes it has!’ So I was lucky I didn’t touch it. I had the feeling. I am always very wary.”
(Young woman with nut allergy)

A few respondents mentioned the more positive step taken by restaurant chains such as Harvester and TGI Friday, this new policy indicated on the menu whether nuts were present in the meals.

A1.2.3 Takeaways

Similar precautions were taken when buying food from takeaway establishments as when eating out in a restaurant. Questions about ingredients, cooking oils and methods of serving were often asked. Fish and chip shops tended to be viewed as safe” as long as refined oil was used and/or it did not double as a ‘Chinese’ takeaway:

“Yes, he can eat fish and chips from the shop, there’s no problem, in different manufacturing processes, it changes, which is unfortunate so we stick to what we know. We don’t take any chances.” (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

Again, familiarity with local takeaways had been the key to minimising anxiety. One respondent bought an Indian takeaway every Saturday and the proprietor knew that the dish he ordered had to be nut free. Another woman had built up a similar relationship with a local Chinese takeaway:

“There is a Chinese takeaway across the road and I’ve spoken to the owner there and he’s assured me that they don’t use peanut oil because the cheaper peanut oil may contain protein. And he’s told me which dishes have peanuts in.” (Woman with nut allergy)

A1.2.4 Eating with Friends

Being entertained by friends and family had been problematic for many respondents. The anxiety had been two-fold. Firstly, they had not wanted to ‘put people out’ i.e. having to shop and cater especially for them and secondly, there had been anxiety that the meal would not be entirely nut free:

“The only problem that I think effects my life is when we are invited out to a meal. People have got to think – ‘well what are we going to give...’ With my family, they would probably cook a vegetarian meal. I always feel I am putting them out and going to a lot of bother and I have often just taken my own food and prepared it myself and then have it heated up for me.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“If you’ve got a broken leg they can understand that. If you’ve got blood pouring out of you, they realise that you’re ill. But if you have an allergy, people always seem to think ‘Oh yeah, a peanut allergy, you can’t eat peanuts.’ I did it myself. You assume that it’s because you’re actually eating the nuts. They don’t realise it’s in everything else.” (Woman with nut allergy)

Birthday parties, weddings and other functions presented problems for respondents. One woman with a nut allergy reported telephoning the venue of a wedding reception the day before the event, to ask about the ingredients of the food:

“If we went to a wedding where it was a meal or a buffet, what I try and do is perhaps stay in the hotel the day before so I don’t bother the bride. ‘But is there any nuts?’ They’re normally very good. Or just have a quick chat. I try not to make people feel uncomfortable because I hate being difficult really. If I’m the slightest bit worried, I just don’t eat.” (Woman with nut allergy)

In this respect, the steps taken were similar to those taken when eating at an unknown restaurant:

“We went to my cousin’s wedding the other week and we had minestrone soup and they sometimes put lentils in that, don’t they? If it’s not nuts in soup, it’s lentils.”

“And did you check?”

“Yes, we did but they couldn’t be sure, so I had to leave it.” (Man with nut allergy)

Casual visits to friends meant that precautions had not always been possible and they had declined all food:

“You tend to do that if you’re going to somebody’s, make sure that you’re not hungry. The amount of friends that come round, maybe they’ve not had their tea and they can sit and eat away but I would tend not to – there might have been occasions where I’ve been hungry and I’ve went round but you just don’t really take a chance do you? I think it’s a risk.” (Woman with nut allergy)

A1.2.5 Catering for People with a Nut Allergy

The anxiety felt by respondents when entertained by friends was mirrored in those who occasionally shop and/or prepare meals for nut allergic people. When cooking for nut allergic friends/family they tend to keep to very simple dishes:

“What I tend to do is go and buy fruit and vegetables. If it’s a tomato, I know it’s not got nuts in it .. I buy things that are very very basic products.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

“I tend to cook fresh things. I’ll prepare a roast dinner and there’ll be vegetables and meat, then pudding will be something like fruit, for example. It’s always very simple sort of stuff.. plain stuff that you can actually see.” (Occasional shopper, Cardiff)

Some respondents said that nut allergic guests preferred to bring their own foods so as not to worry their host. Indeed, some clearly found the responsibility of cooking for a person with a nut allergy very stressful:

“I am very cautious about what I’m actually cooking things in as well. Because if you cook something in a pan that has been previously used for cooking something that has had nut oil in it, well I don’t know whether if you wash it, even if you scrubbed it in washing liquid, that it would be okay.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

“I do things like vegetables with plain tomato sauce to do a pasta and I sort of double check that a million times, every vegetable, the sauce, everything and even then it’s frightening I think because the reaction is so severe... her whole throat swells up and she can’t breathe and there is no way I want to be responsible for that.” (Occasional shopper, London)

A1.2.6 Holidays

Families and individuals with nut allergies do travel abroad for their holidays although they tend to confine their travel to developed countries and well-established destinations:

“The only thing is I have never had the desire to backpack around India but I believe that if I did want to do that I wouldn’t be able to do it. But I’ve been to Portugal a few times.” (Woman with nut allergy)

Respondents reported that there were numerous factors to consider when planning a holiday. Self-catering accommodation was preferred as it enabled families and individuals to prepare their own meals. Some would take certain foods with them to ensure a supply of ‘safe’ food:

“We always go self-catering and take a lot of food with us. We can’t risk it. We would love to go all-inclusive but we can’t risk it. It is too risky.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

The extra precautions taken included taking extra medical supplies and, before setting out, identifying and locating the nearest medical centers and hospitals:

“This year we went to Greece and we made sure that we had triple of everything for a start. And we did take precautions before we went to locate the address and details of the nearest hospital and doctor and those sorts of things. And we stuck to fresh produce to be honest and washed everything really thoroughly.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

“If we go abroad, we need to be a little bit more prepared. Check out where the local medical centre is you know, because obviously you’re a bit aware if anything happened, you’d want to be there fairly quickly. You tend to stick to basic foods. Things like beef burgers and things like that.” (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

Declaration of a food allergy to an insurance company proved very difficult for one family with a nine-year-old son with a severe nut allergy. They found their request for insurance guaranteed a surcharge but not necessarily the desired security:

“The year before we couldn’t get insurance or the insurance was really high. The insurance company charged an extra £200 or £300 but there was a clause in it saying that he would not be covered. They loaded the premium yet there was an exclusion on it.” (Father of child with nut allergy)

Travelling to/from their destination had also been a factor that required planning. British Airways has a ‘no nut’ policy in place on all their flights but this was not consistent with other airlines. One respondent with a severe allergy to peanuts had sat in the cockpit of the airplane on a holiday flight as the airline had served nuts in the passenger cabin:

“They were not willing to take nuts off the flight so I ended up flying in the cockpit with the pilot. To make it worse, on the way home they were foreign pilots and they didn’t know why I was there.” (Young woman with nut allergy)

On another occasion, the same family decided to travel by ferry and travelled first class in an attempt to minimise the anxiety:

“I thought we would go first class because there would be less people and less chance of a problem. But they served nuts in the first class cabin so I thought ‘get out of here quick!’ But the boat is not as bad, as at least you can get outside on a boat.” (Young woman with nut allergy)

Some countries offer more information about nut content in their restaurants. In the USA, ingredient lists were often available in restaurants:

“Nine times out of ten, they would bring this great big folder and they would go through the ingredients and say ‘this is in this and if you want to have this..’ They were really helpful.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Language difficulties could also compound the problems of a person with nut allergy. When travelling to non-English speaking countries a small number of respondents took a card explaining their condition in the local language, which they gave to restaurant staff. Others simply hoped that the restaurant staff would understand English.

Various communication problems were described by respondents:

“I went to Cyprus two years ago and we were in a restaurant and I asked for a plain ice-cream. And they said ‘do you want topping?’ And I said, ‘no, nothing’, and they brought the ice cream out with crushed nuts on it. I said, ‘I can’t eat nuts’ and asked them to take it back and ‘can I have another one?’ So they took it back and they scraped it off. I could SEE the nuts! I got so annoyed. I just got up and left.” (Young woman with nut allergy)

“For instance, when we were in Germany, we had an ice-cream and you know how they wash the scoop and they look at you like you’re from another planet when you say, ‘would you mind rinsing that under separate water?’” (Teenager with nut allergy)

A1.2.7 Entertainment Venues

For those with a severe reaction to peanuts, even sitting in close proximity to a person eating peanuts can be sufficient to cause an allergic reaction. This could happen in any public place but in confined spaces such as the cinema and theatre, the situation may be exacerbated:

“I went to the theatre recently and people around me were eating peanut M&M’s and I left rather than sit beside people who had finished eating. Again it’s a risk I have to take.” (Woman with nut allergy)

A1.3 Growing up with a Nut Allergy

A1.3.1 Childhood

All the children in the sample had known about their nut allergy from an early age (2-4 years). They had become accustomed to keeping to a nut free diet at home, at school and when out with friends. Their parents commented on their adjustment to managing their child’s condition:

“I know it sounds terrible but we have kind of grown up with it literally from birth. As soon as he was going into hospital for his tests then we were getting used to what he could and couldn’t have and then his health was getting better, his skin was getting better and he wasn’t having so many attacks. It was just all of us getting used to what he could and couldn’t have.” (Father of child with nut allergy)

Within the home, a child’s diet could be controlled. At school, children take lunch boxes due to the uncertainty over the content of school meals, although parents voiced concerns that other children may have nuts as snacks in their boxes. One of the children’s schools prohibited nuts on the premises and an owner of a nursery school in Edinburgh (who was an occasional shopper), did not permit peanuts in her nursery school although she did not suggest that other nuts were banned:

“I have a children’s nursery school and it’s a blanket ban. We won’t allow peanut butter sandwiches or anything like that. They have a snack morning and afternoon so there’s a ban on any nut products there.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

Schools were generally helpful in ways such as; asking parents if there were any areas of concern (e.g. a bread tasting session), requesting that food brought in for cake sales or parties were labelled with ingredients, carrying an additional EpiPen. One school had, however, initially raised objections to admitting a nut-allergic child because of the additional responsibility.

Parents admitted to feelings of great anxiety and a certain amount of over-protectiveness towards their child especially when they were not in control of the child’s environment away from home:

“I think the hardest time was when she was younger and she started to want to go out to tea with friends.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Invitations to friends for tea usually led to discussions between the respective parents about food/meals. Sometimes mothers would go along to check the food at a friend’s home for reassurance:

“There were some parents who I thought were fantastic who said ‘I’m a bit scared about having her, what can I give her?’ Some said, ‘yes, she can come but can you please check what she is going to eat before she eats it and then you can go’. The ones who said to me, ‘it is okay. I don’t like the sound of this. I am going to pretend it is not real’. That is when I made excuses and she didn’t go because I felt they weren’t ready to deal with it and I thought it was unfair to give this to someone. Not everyone can handle the responsibility.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Some of the experiences of those who occasionally catered for children with nut allergies demonstrated how difficult it could be:

“It wasn’t long after Christmas and we still had a bowl of fancy biscuits and she (the mother of a child with a nut allergy) sort of interrogated me, ‘what’s in them?’ but just checking, at the bottom of the tin of biscuits, lo and behold, all these almond extracts. So I really plan a week before when he comes down now and I ask her, ‘what would you prefer me to give him?’” (Occasional shopper, Cardiff)

The children themselves offered their feelings on this subject saying how they sometimes felt uncomfortable when eating at friends and how it can take time to build up their confidence to ask about the food they were offered:

“Sometimes I don’t eat at friends’ houses. My sister’s best friend, her mum knows all about it so I feel okay about eating there. But other people’s houses, like my friends’ houses, I don’t normally eat there.” (Child with nut allergy)

Birthday parties were a cause of significant concern, the hostess might not be someone whom the parents knew well, so they felt less able to impose restrictions on the food offered to the child. Although food-containing nuts could be identified, the situation was less controllable as foods containing nuts could easily become mixed with nut-free food. Shop bought birthday cakes were generally considered a hazard as most had NTC warnings:

“Parties are a bit different. Very often, you know, people will have a plate of sort of sandwiches, and say you know, ‘never mind’, so it is in one ear out the other, so parties are always a bit scary, and the party cake at the end, is generally from Marks or Tesco, so it always has it (NTC warnings).” (Child with nut allergy)

From an early age parents teach children to examine the labels on pre-packed food. This is seen as a way of ensuring that children take some responsibility as they become more independent:

“About two years ago when Anna was nine she started reading the packaging herself. It wasn’t so much the actual reading it; it was the confidence that she could believe it. If we read it together that was okay but actually reading it on her own there was an element of still not being sure about it. That has changed in the last eighteen months.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

When introducing children to foods they could/could not eat, parents invariably found it easier to tell their offspring to avoid all nuts and NTC warnings. They felt, this made it more straightforward for the child as they did not have to make fine judgements (and potentially, mistakes) about suitable foods:

“When you are trying to train them. So he has been denied lots of things that actually would have been fine.” (Child with nut allergy)

“Christopher, bless him, he shouldn’t hear this but he is only actually allergic to peanuts but not the others but we don’t distinguish any nuts because I think it is too difficult at this age.” (Mother of a 9-year-old child with nut allergy)

A1.3.2 Teenage Years

Mothers and grandmothers of young children with a nut allergy talked of their anxiety over the impending teenage years with the new risks this would involve as offspring moved towards independence:

“And I think Andrew is going to have great difficulty as he gets older, with cosmetics, girls and cosmetics, and being kissed by a girl who has been in the pub, eating nuts, that is my biggest worry – that he will one day want to kiss a girl, and she has been eating a bowl of nuts... which is quite scary, but he is not in that high risk category yet. But that is all coming. It is horrible.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

*“With children, it’s different because it’s their parents looking out for them all the time. But I read something recently, somebody had died. I think it was a teenager and they were saying that more teenagers die because they are out of their parent’s control. They have been used to their parents looking out for them.”
(Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)*

Mothers of teenage children voiced their anxieties about the lack of control they felt and the risks they feared their children would be exposed to. Vivid memories of their child in a critical state in hospital do not help their confidence in allowing the child more freedom:

“How has it affected you?”

“Over-protective mum. I think once you’ve seen a reaction that’s that severe, you know... I do get a bit panicky and maybe overprotective when she’s out. But I know she doesn’t like to carry the EpiPen with her and she’s also got her inhaler to carry as well, so she finds it inconvenient to have the two. I know I should be able to say ‘right, she’s old enough to know’. But you do actually need reminding, don’t you, Naomi?”

“No.”

“Yes, you do.”

“I’ve forgotten it once!” (Teenager with nut allergy and mother)

The teenage years are a time of transition and at times the teenager may still rely on their parents to take control but at other times they have to take responsibility for themselves. Parents increasingly recognise the need to instill in their children a sense of self-reliance:

“Ian checks and also I quite like him to do that because I’m not there to baby sit him and I think it’s wrong to just leave it to one person in the household. It’s like saying ‘make sure you’ve got the nut pills in your handbag’. It’s not because I don’t care but he’s alone at times and at Uni.” (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

Indeed, there were several examples of teenagers who were prepared to assert themselves:

“Often when I eat at someone else’s house and their parents make food and then they look at it and say ‘everything is alright’. But then I’ll look at it and find something.” (Teenager with nut allergy)

“I was in orchestra with the School of Music and one of the tutors started eating a ‘Fuse’ behind me which contains peanuts. I had to ask him if he could move to the side of the room before I had a reaction.” (Diary of teenager with nut allergy)

One teenager acknowledged the problem of peanuts in bowls in pubs and at parties. His close friends were aware of his allergy and before going into a bar would make sure that it was safe for him to enter.

Concern about developing relationships with the opposite sex were also raised by teenagers and substantiated by an account in one of the teenager's diaries:

"I couldn't kiss my boyfriend because he had just eaten a Snickers Bar." (Diary of a teenager with a nut allergy)

Parents were generally concerned about their teenage offspring when out with friends:

"They tend to have a lot of sleepovers and she says 'We're having a Chinese'. And of course that's a big concern. I mean she knows if we have it she'll obviously just have something like chips and noodles. But you never know at their age whether she wants to experiment with new foods. And it must be a temptation for someone to say 'Oh this tastes really nice'. Obviously I have to trust her to have it in the back of her mind that you know, it's a risk for her really." (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

Indeed, this mother's concern had been reinforced by the experience of a woman with a nut allergy who was in her 20's:

"I once had a Chinese takeaway with my friends. I was at a sleepover and I've got to be careful not to eat satay so I didn't order anything that I thought would hurt me. But I could tell that the taste was there. My tongue started to itch and swell so I knew. As soon as I put something in my mouth, I knew. When I spoke to someone at the takeaway, they'd cleaned the wok with peanut oil and then fried the special fried rice in it." (Woman with nut allergy)

The desire not to stand out had been evident from comments made by teenage respondents:

"People will try and be friendly and say 'Have a chocolate bar or have a Malteser' I would have to say 'Sorry, can I read the ingredients?' And sometimes they will get annoyed and say 'What do you have to read the ingredients for? It's just a chocolate bar.' I feel like I am sort of odd in a way... I am aware it is a bit strange and I have to read all the ingredients and stuff." (Teenager with nut allergy)

"Teenagers don't want to be identified with any sort of condition, do they? This is the problem." (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

Being singled out as different may have contributed to the cases of bullying reported by two female respondents. The first case involved a teenager being taunted with the threat of having peanuts put in her

sandwich box. This happened after she had returned to school following an anaphylactic shock reaction during a school cookery lesson:

“I took her out of the school in the end because she did have problems with bullying as well as the nut allergy. This is life threatening and they knew that she was allergic to nuts and if someone threatens her with a nut, it’s like someone threatening her with a gun.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

The other case involved a woman who had been taunted as a teenager by a group of other students at school:

“When I was a teenager, someone was larking around and I said ‘I’m allergic to peanuts because it makes me sick’. And they chased me with a peanut butter jar. And they were holding it over my mouth, pinning me down, holding it so I could smell it because they knew it made me feel sick. It touched my skin and within ten minutes I had a raised bump around my face and I felt I wanted to tear it off... it was a perfect circle where they put the jar over my face. They all panicked then thinking, ‘What have we done?’ I was itchy and red and sore and I was scratching and it was weepy.” (Woman with nut allergy)

One teenager reported that she had been uncomfortable carrying her EpiPen when out with friends and she refused to wear what she referred to as a ‘dog tag’. However, most teenagers were vigilant and carried both antihistamine tablets as a first line of defence plus an EpiPen:

“I’m NOT wearing a tag so they know you’ve got an allergy.” (Teenager with nut allergy)

One young woman had been searched when entering clubs and questioned about her EpiPen however, she had never been prevented entry to clubs because of it.

On the whole, the teenagers in this survey did not appear to take significant risks, but only half were going out regularly with friends. In fact, two of these commented they were aware of a friend with a nut allergy who had taken ‘real’ risks.

The principal concerns about the teenage lifestyle were:

- exposure to nuts in uncontrolled environments such as pubs and at parties
- temptation to ‘follow the crowd’ and try new foods (especially if intoxicated)
- desire not to be seen as different and either not carry medication or fail to inform others about their allergy
- relationships and exposure to nuts from kissing.

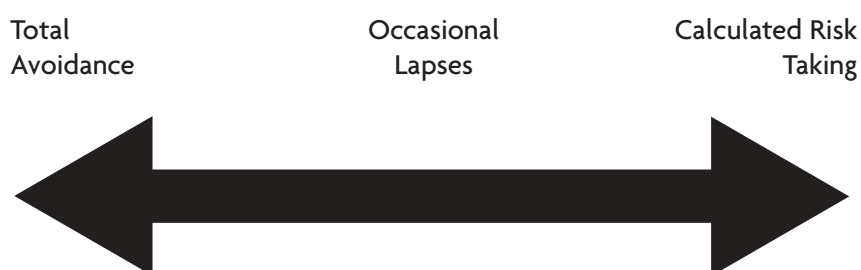
A1.4 Strategies for Coping

A1.4.1 Attitudes to Risk

On the basis of this sample, respondents seemed to be dealing with their nut allergy (or the allergy of a family member or friend) in a range of ways. These centred around the level of apparent risk they were prepared to accept when deciding what they could eat.

This range of approaches can be visualised as a continuum and any one respondent's position on the continuum would depend on the strategy they were using to decide about their diet. The level of risk they were prepared to take may, it would seem, change from year to year as the nature of their allergy changed or their perception of their allergy changed. It might also change from day to day due to various factors, which are described in more detail later in this section.

Although a continuum, it is possible to characterise three main points along it, as shown below.



The rest of this section explains the characteristics of the respondents taking the different approaches.

However, it is important to note the difficulties of discussing the issue of how much risk people are prepared to accept when coping with their allergy. Frequently there was a marked reluctance to admit to taking any risk at all and it was only as the discussion unfolded that inconsistencies arose or respondents were prepared to admit to eating products they knew possibly contained nut traces. Therefore it has to be accepted that the picture gained from respondents as to their behaviour may not be an accurate reflection of the real state of affairs. If anything however, it was thought that, in reality, people tended to take more risks than they were prepared to admit to, rather than fewer.

There are several reasons as to why people do not like to admit to taking risks. Firstly, they may be concerned about worrying other people, particularly close family, who they know are anxious about the condition. Secondly, if they are seen as taking a risk, other people may conclude that their condition is not as serious as they make out and take more chances when serving them food. They may not understand, for example, that they are taking a risk because they are not allergic to a particular nut or

they have eaten the same product for years despite the warning of possible contamination on it. The worst interpretation would be if people felt they were seeking attention because of their allergy but perhaps, it was not as serious as they made out:

“People get really upset, ‘why are you eating that, how do you know it hasn’t got nuts in?’ I get that sort of pressure, never pressure to eat anything.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“But no, I have had sometimes people saying ‘Oh it can’t be that bad’ and ‘It’s not as if you’re going to collapse now’ and all this. I have had it, aye.” (Woman with nut allergy)

This last point was in fact reinforced by one of the occasional shoppers who felt that anyone with a nut allergy who took any risk at all did not **genuinely** have a nut allergy:

“It belittles the whole nut allergy thing...either you are or you aren’t.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

The real difficulty of admitting to risk taking was shown by one family. It was found that when interviewed together with their son, a mother and father insisted that they avoided all levels of nut content/contamination but when the father had to leave the room and the discussion moved on, it emerged that in fact the child was regularly eating breakfast cereals and a particular sweet that he had eaten for years even though it now carried a warning. The mother clearly wanted to keep it from her husband:

“We haven’t told Dad about the Frosties and the Shreddies warning though because he would stop you eating that. He hasn’t had a reaction so...” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

A1.4.2 Total Avoidance

Those practicing a total avoidance approach, quite literally, set out to avoid any contact with nuts, however small or however remote the likelihood of a reaction. Typically, when interviewed, they found it difficult to retrieve any processed products from their kitchen because they relied on fresh, plain food. The majority of respondents in Northern Ireland all followed this approach, as did a few other respondents. All the occasional shoppers but one also set out to follow the total avoidance approach. The reason they had given was that they did not wish to take chances with someone else’s health.

The total avoidance approach had also been adopted by the parents of young children who either did not know the extent of their child’s allergy or who simply found it easier to operate a total ban on nuts for themselves and/or their child.

A1.4.3 Occasional Lapses

There were a very small number of respondents who generally were usually very strict with their diet but they admitted to occasionally eating something that could possibly be contaminated with nuts.

This arose simply because they were not aware of individual ingredients and assessed that it did not present a problem for them, or they felt that they deserved a “treat”. Another reason they had given was that they had not been aware of any possible nut contamination because the NTC warnings had been recently introduced on previously “safe” food.

A1.4.4 Calculated Risk Taking

The majority of respondents with a nut allergy admitted to taking some risks when choosing what foodstuffs to eat.

Very often, this happened with products where a NTC warning had been introduced to a product that they had previously been eating without any adverse effects:

“Yes, I usually eat it (Toffee Crisp). I would eat that. I know it hasn’t got nuts in it, but yes, it has a sign saying ‘may contain nut traces.’” (Young woman with nut allergy)

In addition, there were certain products that respondents found difficult to “imagine” containing nuts and therefore ignored any NTC warning, such products included fresh meat and boiled sweets.

Respondents willingness to take risks with such products depended on a number of factors (covered in “Perceived Security Depending on Current State of Health”).

Uncertainty Regarding the Breadth and Severity of their Allergy

Some respondents were unsure about which particular nuts they were allergic to. This was either because they had not been fully tested or they had a different level of reaction to different nuts. This meant that they might be more likely to take chances with the apparently less dangerous nuts:

“I don’t know what nuts I’m allergic to.” (Teenager with nut allergy)

The changing nature of nut allergies also caused further confusion:

“I mean, your reaction went right down with hazelnuts, but your Brazil allergy has gone up from 6 millimetres, to 22. And so that one is getting better... and walnuts ... so I am not quite sure which way they will go, but yes, I mean also because you are an allergic person, there is always the chance that some other new thing could come in.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

This mother felt that she could no longer take the same risks with ingredients when baking for her family:

“I’ve become more aware because each reaction gets worse and he’s not growing out of it. I remember clearly I was still making this cake with almonds quite happily and there was never a problem. Now I know that would be different now, so I think there is constant change in your reactions.” (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

Perceived Security Depending on Environment

Risk-takers said that they were very careful about where and when they were prepared to take a risk. For instance, if they were at home or in a familiar environment with people they knew well and trusted, who knew how to deal with an allergic reaction they might try a food they were unsure of:

“If it was in the middle of, I was on holiday once in the middle of Cornwall, it was miles away from anywhere and I thought no, I’d better not risk it. But you know locally, yes, I’ve always risked it.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“These cookie things are something that we wouldn’t risk outside, we would avoid cookies, wouldn’t we? Unless we had the pen (injectable adrenaline) and we were somewhere sensible. I wouldn’t send him to school with a pack of cookies, or anything like that. I think they are a bit suspect.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Perceived Security Depending on Current State of Health

Judgements would also be made on the basis of how well someone was feeling, particularly with respect to other allergies they may have:

“Although we are much more likely to take a risk if we are at home, and if the asthma is fine, and I know the lung capacity is on target and that sort of thing. But we tend not to take chances if we are out.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

A1.4.5 A Staged Approach to Testing Foods and Self-Treatment

When respondents described trying new foods it was clear they had adopted a staged approach which allowed them to ‘test’ the product.

Respondents described how sensitivity might be experienced before touching the food. For example, respondents talked of entering a room and feeling hot, tingly or their skin might become irritated if nuts were present. Some also described being able to smell nuts:

“We went to a New Year’s party and they had put some nuts in the back room and he went in there and said ‘I’m feeling very tickly’ but we couldn’t work it out.” (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

Several respondents described how they had been told to pass the food over their bottom lip and assess any reaction. If there were no reaction, they went to the next stage of taking a small bite to tasting the food:

“But I know if I have got the pen (injectable adrenaline), then you know, it is not too bad, and he will have a tiny bite and see what happens.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

“I just have it and then if, after the first mouthful, I feel a bit itchy, then I stop.” (Teenager with nut allergy)

“And it’s not fair because we eat those things from Marks which are perfectly okay at this point and because the sensation is so instant, if you’re not sure and he quite fancies it, he’ll put it on his tongue.” (Teenager with nut allergy)

If respondents did not taste nuts and there were no further reactions they would swallow the food. If, at any stage they felt a reaction they would immediately stop, spit out the food, rinse their mouth and in extreme cases, make themselves sick:

“But I can taste the peanuts immediately. As soon as they get in my mouth I can taste it and I just made myself violently sick and I went into hospital and sat in the emergency department and I was absolutely fine after a couple of hours and I went home.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“There has been a couple of times when you have said ‘this doesn’t taste right, I can feel something in my back’, and then we have given you some... I just clean my teeth. Yes, he rinses his mouth.” (Mother and son with nut allergy)

In responding to an adverse reaction, the offending food was removed from the mouth and some form of medication taken. The type of medication would depend on the severity of the reaction. As a first step anti-histamines might be taken, followed by (or combined with) an inhaler containing an adrenaline agent (although these are not widely available in the UK and tend to be for children). The injectable adrenaline in the form of an EpiPen would only be used in severe cases and would usually be followed by a visit to hospital.

A1.4.6 The Family Context

This section describes how nuts were dealt with within the wider family environment.

Many of the families banned all nuts, in their raw state, from the home, although a small number of parents had allowed nuts to be eaten in the home once a child had gone to bed. Several parents/partners avoided eating nuts in the home at all times because they felt it was not worth the risk:

“No nuts of any description I don’t buy at all, nor anything for anybody in the house ever. They are just not bought anymore. It is too much we think in case we left a packet or something. She wouldn’t, but you just don’t know when you are not thinking so none of us eats nuts of any description.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

“We stay clear of things. Like Dad’s given up peanuts now because he used to like them for the protein but he doesn’t know which room to go into. It does make life much easier.” (Teenager with nut allergy)

“We just don’t have nuts in the house. If I fancy a nut I will go out and buy some. It’s strange because if I have eaten something and come in, he can actually smell if I’ve eaten a nut or something.” (Mother of nut allergic child)

“Yes, there are nuts in the house, under the stairs in their packaging in a carrier bag tied up in a knot in a plastic box. For when she is out.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

Families allowed products with NTC warnings to be consumed by other family members. These foods were often kept in a different place to the nut free food. However, mistakes had occasionally happen and a family member had eaten nuts without realising the potential risks:

“I felt awful the other night because I had some Bombay Mix. Diane was out and her brother was watching something on TV here and my husband was watching TV up there so I thought I would sit in Diane’s room by myself. Not thinking. And she said, ‘Mum, get off my bed and change my sheets, you’re eating nuts in my bedroom.’ I felt... oh, I didn’t think. And I should think.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

A1.4.7 Sources of Information

Respondents were asked about access to sources of information on nut allergy and about shopping for food. A handful of respondents mentioned nut free product lists provided by retailers:

“Well, he (twin brother with a nut allergy) goes onto the internet and he’ll print out lists of things which there’s nuts in which you wouldn’t think there would be nuts in so he’s taking precautions and he takes a list out with him when he goes shopping to make sure. He’s being calculated a bit.” (Occasional shopper, Cardiff)

“I go on the website for Safeway and Tesco, because that’s normally where I shop and they actually have lists, they provide you with lists of products that are nut free. So that helps because what I tend to do is meet her and then we go shopping together for whatever we are going to have.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

However, the nut free lists changed frequently and it had become necessary to check suppliers regularly for updates:

“We phoned Tesco’s or Sainsbury’s and they did provide us with a list and it becomes out of date very, very quickly. And what we find also is that manufacturers are able to change and improve without informing you, so it becomes worthless unless you keep it completely up to date.”

“And they weren’t sending you updated versions?”

*“No they were not.. and when you went into the store it said ‘new’ or ‘improved’ and it was hard to keep track of really.”
(Mother of child with nut allergy)*

Some respondents were surprised that more information had not been available in-store. Those respondents without access to the Internet were especially concerned about this:

“There is still not a lot in supermarkets, like leaflets. You don’t get a leaflet about food you know what I mean? There is not enough information about things like that.” (Young woman with nut allergy)

Respondents claimed that helpful leaflets were often found in health food shops:

*“And I trust what they say and they give you leaflets and things. Well, they have more time with you. They spend a lot of time with you. They tend to take the time to look up stuff in books and if you’re feeling unsure, whereas in a supermarket...”
(Occasional shopper, Cardiff)*

Several respondents had been in touch with particular manufacturers about the content of specific products and had found them very helpful:

“It looked quite innocent on the label but whenever I contact this company and they send me information. I have to say food companies are excellent about giving you information. This information said that the product (cream crackers) was actually made on the same line as sesame crackers. I don’t have an allergy to sesame but a lot of people with peanut allergies do. It doesn’t say that on the package.” (Woman with nut allergy)

On occasions, friends and relations of those with nut allergies had tried to find information to help them understand the condition:

“Everything we know is simply by reading about it or friends have pointed things out, but official groups, no.” (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

Very few respondents had heard or made use of the Anaphylaxis Campaign. One respondent had been very positive about the work of the Campaign:

“There is a society called the Anaphylaxis Association that is purely a charitable association and it does a lot of good work, I’m not saying that it doesn’t. But in this political environment they are going on that health is our prime care. Well, why can’t they give the Anaphylaxis Association some extra money that they could do more advertising and make people more aware as opposed to just companies?” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

However, another respondent had ceased to be a member because she felt that they treated nut allergies as a disability.

Appendix 2: Shopping Behaviour

A2.1 Experience of Shopping

Without exception, respondents said that it took far longer to shop for someone with a nut allergy because of the need to pick up the product and scrutinise labels carefully:

“The usual nightmare of what should really take twenty minutes takes me about an hour because I’m the woman reading all the labels.” (Woman with nut allergy)

A high degree of self-consciousness was associated with the examination of packs, even for those accustomed to it:

“I am standing there for ages. I think they think I am shoplifting.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

“I mean, the fact you have to look through the ingredients like you were saying earlier about, you feel a bit self-conscious in the supermarket standing there looking through things and you think people who are walking past must be thinking oh, I must be looking to see which is the best buy. I don’t think you should have to do that. I think they should have it stamped in big red letters on it.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

A2.2 Regular Shoppers

Many of the regular shoppers had a basic repertoire of products they relied upon and the extra time taken to shop was a reflection of the number of ‘new’ product labels they had to study:

“Well, I am not very adventurous with food anyway. We know what we are going to buy as we buy the same things. It would only be one or two items each week that is going to be different for me.” (Young woman with nut allergy)

“In certain stores, where I know what I’m picking up, I can just go in but if it’s something different, something I’ve not seen before, I’m longer.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“You think of what they have labelled in the past and you sort of build up this history of how they label things and sort of take it from there but if it is something completely new, we are a bit wary.” (Adult with nut allergy)

However, other respondents, often those shopping for children, were more vigilant and continued to check products, even those they bought regularly. These respondents were concerned that NTC warnings could appear on hitherto ‘safe’ products:

“I tend to still read everything. I had taken it for granted a couple of years ago that there were products I could buy that I knew were safe but that is not the case because it changes so much now.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

“I think you seriously have to look at the packaging all the time.” (Man with nut allergy)

Very occasionally a prohibited product was “re-labelled” and became available to the nut allergic person again:

“A very strange thing happened. I went into Tesco’s and got a French stick – just the normal ones you get. And I looked at the back of it and it said ‘might contain nut traces’. It was just a lump of bread. So I was very happy a couple of days ago when I realised that they had removed that warning. So I was able to have it again.” (Teenager with nut allergy)

Although respondents had checked products in the shop, some families remained cautious and not automatically assumed they could use them. The food labels were checked again at home and again before the product was cooked and served:

“I do have to check all products before I use them in case the manufacturers have changed the ingredients and then I have to go back and recheck them again.” (Woman with nut allergy)

As a consequence of the repeated checking, the general opinion was that shopping had to be done in person, and Internet shopping was not a realistic option.

A2.3 Occasional Shoppers

Not only had the occasional shoppers felt strongly about the length of time it took to scrutinise products, but they had also experienced greater anxiety over the responsibility of catering for someone with a potentially life-threatening condition. Their inexperience, and the uncertainty they felt over which food to buy, made the task both onerous and stressful:

“It takes forever and a day to go through it all.” (Occasional shopper, Cardiff)

“In my case, when it’s only occasionally that I cook for someone with a nut allergy I may not be as quick shopping as someone who does it every day.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

“I do shop maybe once a month for one of my friends but I find it a chore. It’s a nightmare. I hate it. I mean I wish I could just go in a shop and there was one shelf which was just for that.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

Several respondents mentioned occasions when they had bought food products that they assumed were suitable for people with nut allergy

because they had not seen the NTC warnings on the packs. Their mistake might have been pointed out by the person with the nut allergy or by the parent of the child in question, and the respondent had felt embarrassed and guilty. They had also wasted money, although this had been low on their list of concerns.

Some respondents were shocked to find the enormous number of products that actually contain nuts:

“It’s the amount of things that actually does contain it though. Until you actually come across somebody who does suffer from it and you’ve then got to have a look. I mean, you are talking hundreds of things that actually contain it, and it’s frightening.”
(Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

A2.4 Product Areas

The main food products where nut content/contamination had been a particular issue were identified as cakes, biscuits, confectionery, ice cream and ice lollies, breakfast cereals, prepared meals and desserts/puddings.

However, respondents also spoke of the ingredients of skin and hair care products:

“Cream that was applied to a stiff neck brought out a reaction. It was found to contain almond oil.” (Diary of mother of young woman with nut allergy)

“Lisa going to get her hair done. I phoned the hairdresser just to double check about sprays etc. Lisa has her hair done upstairs in a separate area.” (Diary of mother of young woman with nut allergy)

One woman’s first experience of an allergic reaction to nuts had been an anaphylactic shock reaction to hair shampoo that contained peanut oil. She had been careful about both foodstuffs and body products since:

“Purchased lipstick. Contacted retailer to check on content re nuts. Left several messages with my telephone number but no one returned my call. Eventually I rang again; the person did not have the correct file... she did not think there was a nut content but suggested I speak to staff at retailer locally. She gave me the name of peanuts in Latin, as that is how they are listed in cosmetics. Apparently, each branch has a contents list but I wasn’t told that when I asked the assistant for their customer service telephone number. I haven’t had the time yet to go back to the shops to check so haven’t used the lipstick.” (Diary of woman with nut allergy)

Some respondents were aware that nut ingredients were written in Latin on the labels of some cosmetics/skin care/hair products. The Body

Shop was mentioned on several occasions as a brand with which one had to take care because of its use of ‘natural products’:

“I am very careful about what products she uses. The Body Shop were doing things and I said, ‘don’t buy from the Body Shop’ because they were doing little bath pearls and someone said to me they do a Brazil nut one.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

A number of respondents with a nut allergy also suffered from eczema and some wondered if there was a causal relationship. One family had heard that a traditional treatment for this condition contained a nut-based oil:

“90% of nut allergy sufferers get eczema. I’ve got eczema and one of the treatments for eczema is Oilatum and I was lucky enough to watch a programme on the TV and then mum came in with it...

...yes, yes because that was news to me and you wouldn’t take the risk of sitting in the bath, you wouldn’t do that. It never occurred to me. If it’s in the air, you open some peanuts but sitting in the bath, it doesn’t bear thinking about.” (Teenager with nut allergy and mother)

A2.5 Shopping Issues

The most prevalent issue raised about shopping were changes or inconsistencies in the NTC warnings.

Many products, which had previously been considered ‘safe’, now carried NTC warnings. Respondents were confused as to whether the processing methods or actual content of the product had changed. This led to a lot of the calculated risk taking. Chocolate products were identified as having frequent label changes. This could also often be applied to biscuits and cereals:

“We bought Chocolate Fingers tonight and they have always been safe and now they are not safe anymore. And that is where I think you would have a problem because if you checked a product and it is safe and then, without any warning a “may contain” label appears on the back. Now, if I hadn’t seen it I could have given it to my grandchild and she could have died, that is all there is to it.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

Respondents felt they were being treated unfairly when NTC warnings appeared on staple snacks such as Cream Crackers and Rich Tea biscuits which are commonly eaten by people with a nut allergy.

Respondents noted that not all brands of foodstuffs carried NTC warnings. For instance, it was felt that own brands were more likely to have NTC warnings, particularly biscuits and cereals:

“Rich Tea biscuits, we have McVitie’s, not Tesco’s own, we have learnt that one, haven’t we?” (Child with nut allergy)

“It’s normally the branded makes (that are okay). The Sainsbury’s and the Asda’s and Safeways, normally their own make usually contain nut traces. And nine times out of ten you know that.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

“If you go into Tesco for something like Bran Flakes, and buy the Tesco own brand it has a nut warning on them, but Kelloggs haven’t...”

“Why do you think Tesco’s have the warning?”

“It is just to cover themselves.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

A number of respondents felt that the quality, and hence price, of a product could be used as a guide to nut content – the less expensive products were less likely to contain nuts as nuts were a more expensive ingredient. Respondents gave examples of mincemeat and, in particular, chocolate.

Respondents also identified other forms of labelling inconsistency:

- products within the same range (e.g. chocolate)

“Some chocolate... one Galaxy has got nuts and one Galaxy hasn’t. Even though they are just chocolate without anything in them.” (Child with nut allergy)
- the same product but in different sized packaging (e.g. snack packs of cookies and family packs)
- between a chocolate Easter egg and its contents.

Shoppers found it difficult to understand how certain types of product appeared to be totally free of any nut ingredient but still had NTC warnings on them. Those mentioned by respondents were plain bread, turkey, pickle and boiled sweets:

“But then there were odd things that I... found like cherry and chocolate mousse and I thought ‘where are there going to be nuts in that?’ But it had it on the packaging.” (Occasional shopper, London)

Other products that might have been expected to contain nuts did not have a NTC warning. This caused some uncertainty about whether to trust the label. Crunchy cereals or cereal bars, often based on oats, were highlighted here:

“We also have got into the habit of buying what we feel safe with as well, so we tend not to, I mean we did buy a new cereal the other week which was the...Organic...Clusters, Organic Clusters...”

“Yes. That really looked like nuts, but...”

“We were convinced that it was like a muesli thing, but it was completely free.” (Mother and son with nut allergy)

Imported products caused uncertainty, as respondents did not trust either the labelling standards or the text translations.

A2.6 Ease of Shopping

Most respondents preferred to shop at one or two retail outlets with occasional trips to other stores. The ease with which they did their shopping came down to two main factors:

- the number of the products in the shop that carried some form of NTC warning
- the ease of identifying the NTC warning.

A2.6.1 Discriminatory v Blanket Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

Supermarkets with their mix of own label and manufacturer branded products were generally felt to offer a reasonable choice of products, with and without nut traces. However, certain other chains, such as Marks and Spencer and Thorntons, were more inclined to adopt a blanket or near-blanket approach to NTC warnings for pre-packed foods. Respondents found this approach frustrating:

“On the other hand, what we do blame, is companies like Marks and Spencer who put a nut allergy alert on everything... because Marks and Spencer, on their sherbets, have a nut allergy alert.”
(Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

“There are some shops I don’t even bother going into. For example, M&S. Normally everything in there in terms of biscuits, cakes or bread has ‘not suitable for nut allergy sufferers’ on it. So I don’t even bother...and I think it is just the easy option unfortunately.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Among the main retailers, Sainsbury’s was identified on a few occasions as having offered more options for the shopper, particularly with respect to problematic products such as Christmas puddings and birthday cakes that often contained nuts:

“Well you can buy things there that you can’t buy in other places, because other places have got ‘may contain a trace of nuts’ whereas if Sainsbury’s has a trace of nuts, it’s clearly marked. Like they’ve got Christmas pudding in Sainsbury’s, but so many other places you couldn’t buy a Christmas pudding but you could in Sainsbury’s. You can buy Sainsbury’s birthday cakes because they are safe as well.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

Health food shops were also seen as more selective about the use of NTC warnings and the sale of nut-free products:

“And I would also bear in mind what shop I was in, and you know, because I do think that for instance, health food shops, are very clear, and I think that they are much more discerning, and...”

I think that it tends to be particular things that are stamped and lots of other things aren't. There is more option, whereas you know the main supermarket, anything to do with chocolate, or anything to do with cakey things, you know, have a general nut thing on, which is a bit disappointing actually, because it is very hard to say to a child, ignore it." (Mother of child with nut allergy)

It was apparent that a number of respondents were aware of the Kinnerton (Confectionery) Company Limited range of confectionery goods and they stressed how easy it made buying certain products. The brand was well regarded and viewed as an example of how manufacturers could produce product lines in a strict nut free environment:

"I know there's a company in England, Kinnerton's, and they do chocolate and they do cakes and things and I would buy their products before I would buy other people's products. I know they're made in a nut free environment." (Woman with nut allergy)

"I do feel happy with Kinnerton. I really feel confident when I buy Kinnerton chocolates. Because if it's Easter or Christmas time, I automatically look for Kinnerton because they're telling me that it's 'made in a nut free zone.'" (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

A2.6.2 Ease of Identifying Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

This section examines what respondents said about food retailers and their approach to NTC warnings.

Respondents found it difficult to discriminate between retailers' own brands and manufacturers brands, having only a vague idea of how they compared to each other.

Sainsbury's were thought to label clearly (although this had not been borne out by the labels respondents were later shown) while Tesco had been seen as having rather small NTC warnings buried within the ingredient list. Iceland was identified as having improved their NTC warnings. The symbol used by Marks & Spencer to declare 'not suitable for nut sufferers' was felt to be easily identified.

The perception was that retailers' labelled their own brands better than manufacturers' brands but this could have been due to the large number of own brand products in one store and their perceived tendency to apply NTC warnings.

Respondents claimed to take greater care when reading the labels of the products from smaller manufacturers because they were unsure as to the manufacturer approach to NTC warnings and whether it could be trusted.

A2.7 Shopping for Loose Products

Products that were sold “loose” (i.e. non pre-packed) were usually avoided. The main criterion for selection was whether there was a source of nut contamination nearby. Buying fresh meat, fish, fruit and vegetables was perceived as relatively risk-free. However, salad bars where members of the public could help themselves or a deli-counter, where there was a chance that spoons could be used both for nut products and products not containing nuts, were considered hazardous. Some retailers were seen as better than others at ensuring that spoons were kept clean.

Buying from either market stalls or outdoor catering stands was considered to be risky:

“There are always these lovely looking market stalls where they’ve got fresh olives but you see them using the same spoon for the fresh olives as peanuts and that type of thing and I do avoid that.” (Woman with nut allergy)

Both bakery shops and in-store bakeries presented uncertainties over possible contamination and many respondents only bought pre-packed bread. However, some respondents only avoided in-store bakeries if the retailer had signs warning of possible contamination:

“On the bread counter, bakery, they have a big sign up – ‘these may contain a trace of nuts’. They either do or they don’t. That is the most annoying thing, isn’t it? It is probably to cover themselves and by covering themselves openly like that they are spoiling it for people like Christopher and ourselves, it just makes it harder for us.” (Parents of child with nut allergy)

One respondent, when asked about her attitude to in-store bakeries, suddenly realised that she had been taking risks when buying granary bread etc:

“I do do it sometimes and I’ve never ever asked, which is absolutely ridiculous really.” (Partner of adult with nut allergy)

However, there were respondents who were prepared to take the risk:

“They remind me of the ‘Cookie Jar’. I love that place and I suppose I’ll go for white chocolate (cookies) and they’re fine but I will look in the counter and be a bit put off when they’ve got a tray there and they’re all alongside the ones which have nuts. I think ‘oh they’re touching’ or ‘a few crumbs can be on the biscuit I’m going to eat’. So I will have a look and I do buy them and if they are next to ones that have got nuts I will give them a dust off.”

“So will you buy open ones?”

“Yes, but I’m still a bit paranoid. I’ll have a sniff first, a little sample and keep it in my mouth for a little while. Once I’ve tried it and I know it’s okay, then it’s fine.” (Woman with nut allergy)

Respondents considered unwrapped pick ‘n’ mix sweets to be a definite ‘no go’ area for those with a nut allergy because of the high risk of cross contamination. Even when the pick ‘n’ mix sweets were wrapped they were still considered to be a high risk because of possible problems with inaccurately labelled sweets or sweets which were in the wrong compartments:

“I bought some pick ‘n’ mix sweets and there were lots of fudges and they must have been wrapped quickly. It said vanilla and it wasn’t. It was almond or something. There were almonds in the fudge and he had one and of course he was...”

“I was drinking chocolate just to burn my throat..” (Man with nut allergy and wife)

A2.8 Warning Signals and Use of Information

While NTC warnings were clearly vital in helping someone with a nut allergy to make judgements about pre-packed foods, it should be noted that even before a product was picked up and scrutinised, certain cues were used to help someone decide whether to purchase a product. Indeed, on occasion, these early cues might be used to reject a product before it was even picked up.

There were certain types of pre-packed food which had immediately rang alarm bells among the respondents, these included:

- ready made foods, particularly Thai and Indian foods where nuts were often used as an ingredient or thickener for sauces:

“Well, the front doesn’t say anything about nuts but it’s Thai and I would really worry about that. I would definitely read the ingredients through thoroughly.” (Woman with nut allergy)

- vegetarian meals because it raises the question of the protein source:

“Sometimes you know, with all the jargon, the ‘hydrolysed vegetable’ might mean nothing to somebody, but it’s very important that they know it’s peanut related.” (Woman with nut allergy)

- food such as muesli and cereal bars.

The picture on the pack had been the next cue. If the product appeared to have a thick sauce or lumps or ‘chips’ in it respondents became suspicious that the sauce may have been thickened with groundnuts/peanuts and the lumps may be pieces of nut.

The brand, product name or product description might have given rise to certain assumptions about nut content. For example, a small number of respondents assumed that Swiss chocolate always contained nuts; some respondents thought that the phrase, 'country style' and 'crunch' indicated nut content:

“Anything with the words ‘Country Crunch’, I would immediately double check. Because ‘Country Crunch’ has visions of nuts and good things for you – wheat and stuff that they are trying to be healthy. And anything that is trying to be healthy normally has nuts in.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“But then the word ‘country’, you learn from that word that you have Alpen, country, nuts...And the consistency is fairly lumpy.” (Mother and teenager with nut allergy)

“‘Swiss’ always means to me hazelnuts. Normally the manufacturer of good quality chocolate, I’ve learned, is using hazelnuts.” (Woman with nut allergy)

When looking at the label respondents said that they were looking for two pieces of information; the ingredient list and any NTC warning. Some respondents said that they read the list of ingredients first, often beginning at the bottom and working up. This was because nuts were likely to be a smaller constituent and therefore found near the end of the list. Others said they looked for the NTC warning first and, if they found one, they looked closely at the ingredient list to find out more. Even if a NTC warning were not found, shoppers would often scrutinise the ingredient list before buying the product just in case a NTC warning had been missed:

“I would still probably take the decision myself, looking and reading the actual ingredients, I wouldn’t tend to take much – if it had a nut warning, I would look at the ingredients, and if it didn’t actually say nuts anywhere, I would probably risk it.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Appendix 3: Attitudes to Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

A3.1 Introduction

This Appendix looks in detail at what respondents thought about the methods of labelling food products to indicate nut content/contamination. Respondents were asked recall examples of NTC warnings from their own shopping experiences and express an opinion on the various phrases and presentation styles for NTC warnings.

A3.2 Spontaneous Views on Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

A3.2.1 General Variability

All respondents spoke of their experiences with NTC warnings. Many respondents had strong views on current practices. Those who were most accustomed to shopping for themselves or for a family member with a nut allergy were evidently more practised at locating and making a choice on the basis NTC warning. Therefore, the most vehement comments tended to come from those respondents who shopped occasionally for a nut allergic person and found the shopping process was more onerous.

Since occasional shoppers had difficulties finding the information they needed, they assumed it was much harder for the regular shopper to scrutinise the packs for nut content, consequently the occasional shoppers felt very strongly that measures should be taken to make the process easier.

The principal complaints about NTC warnings related to the variability of the phrases used, the position of the NTC warning on the pack, and the legibility of the NTC warning in respect of the style of presentation. The following comments illustrate the problem:

“It’s all over the place, you just have to look at the whole package and see it’s never in any one position, ever. Like in the Snickers bar, it just puts down peanut in the actual ingredients, there’s no other warning in there. A Bounty bar has ‘may contain traces of nut’ at the bottom. Marks and Spencer have some sort of picture, a label picture, other things have ‘may contain traces of seeds or nuts.’ (Teenager with nut allergy)

“I don’t know where to look sometimes. Sometimes I actually miss, you know, the warning as well, some places are very good and have them in big writing and other places have them in small writing.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

“It is very rarely in with the ingredients so you have got your label and you have got all your ingredients in a little box and it is very rare for this to be in that, in the ingredients. Sometimes it is on the other side and in very small writing. If it is in with the ingredients, where it says it ‘may contain traces of nuts’; it is never at the top, it is always right at the bottom. Every time you pick something you have got to examine not only the ingredients. You have got to turn the packaging over and around.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Shopper had to carefully study the pack to decide if there was a NTC warning. Even adept shoppers had missed NTC warnings. When shopping in pairs, one person could spot a NTC warning whilst the other missed it:

“Every now and then, because we have both checked on each other, every now and then I have missed something which Kate picks up and, every now and then, Kate will miss something that I have picked up. And Christopher has joined in with us now. He is stood there and he will pick up. Easter time, you went through the whole Easter eggs down the aisle. ‘I can’t have that one, I can’t have that one.’” (Father of child with nut allergy, Cardiff)

A3.2.2 Positioning of Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

Respondents strongly criticised NTC warnings for not being either prominent or in a standard position.

In almost every interview, contrasts were made with the labelling aimed at vegetarians. Food suitable for vegetarians had a well recognised symbol signifying a clear and positive declaration of suitability prominently displayed on the front face of a product:

“I would like to see it more on the front, not necessarily always on the back, because there’s more and more now for veggie but really if you’re a veggie you’re not going to die. Okay, I’ll not hopefully, but there is people out there... so I think a nut sufferer’s more important than a veggie so I’d like to see it more on the front, more bolder.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“If you’re a vegetarian, usually, that’s a choice that you’ve made whereas this isn’t a choice, it’s something that you have. So that should be like a priority.” (Occasional shopper, London)

Most respondents wanted to see a NTC alert on the front of the pack so that those looking for nut content would not have to pick up the pack to look further. This approach was especially favoured by the occasional shoppers as they felt they could not take a chance with any food regardless of the level of nut content:

“I’d be really annoyed if I had to go around and lift everything up. It would be easier if you could just scan across and it was like a symbol, with a peanut on it or something, easy to recognise.” (Occasional shopper, London)

Despite being experienced at checking the whole pack for a NTC warnings many regular shoppers, particularly those following the 'total avoidance' regime, favoured the idea of a symbol on the front of the pack. The 'calculated risk takers', wanted more information, and would have preferred the NTC warning to be in a consistent position and so that it could be found quickly as well as, being eye-catching and easy to read.

Several respondents mentioned that NTC warnings were often located at the bottom of the ingredient list and they found this frustrating; having carefully checked the ingredient list and found no nut-related ingredients, only to find a NTC warning at the end:

"It's a shame that they don't put the warning above the ingredients because I looked at this one and thought 'now has it or hasn't it?' And then I read all the way through the ingredients and then, underneath the ingredients, is a warning. And you know, if you are somebody that, like in my case, when it's only occasionally that I cook something for someone with a nut allergy, I'm not maybe as quick at like spotting it as maybe somebody who is doing it everyday. So for me, I mean I just read all the ingredients bit and then got to the very bottom and then thought, 'oh yes, that seems okay,' and then it says, at the bottom, it says 'warning.'" (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

A3.2.3 Legibility

The majority of respondents said that, in most cases, the NTC warning did not stand out sufficiently; sometimes this had been due to the small font size and sometimes it was because other information dominated the pack:

"The ingredients can be the little things like, at the bottom like, they say 'may contain nut traces' and it is tiny." (Child with nut allergy, London)

"The ice lollies are that big (indicates size) so the wrappers have to be small so the writing will be small as well so that is going to be hard like, the nuts will be tinsy, won't they?" (Child with nut allergy, Cardiff)

"Sometimes the print is so tiny. I've just changed my glasses but you know when I was getting to the end of the life of the others, I couldn't even see the back of packets." (Occasional Shopper, London)

A multiplicity of information was found on the packs, including a range of translations of the ingredient list, nutritional information and cooking instructions. Stick-on labels for pricing (mainly in small stores) and reduced price stickers were found to occasionally obscure NTC warnings:

"You'd have to spend a few hours looking for the English translation and when I haven't got my glasses on and I can't see it." (Occasional shopper, London)

One man with a nut allergy recounted a time he had checked a pre-cooked biryani in the shop, having failed to find a NTC warning, bought it, taken it home and cooked it, and then checked the pack again and found that it contained almonds. He attributed his oversight both to the font being too small and the black print not offering a contrast to the red background.

Several products were supplied from the kitchen cupboards of respondents and used to demonstrate various points. One respondent supplied a packet of stuffing mix that had the NTC warning in the middle of the ingredient list. Another respondent had a jar of chocolate spread with the NTC warning in a much smaller font than the ingredients.

A3.2.4 Wording of Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

Respondents were asked to make a list of all the NTC warnings they could remember. The ones most frequently recalled were:

‘Not suitable for nut allergy sufferers’

‘May contain nuts/nut traces’

‘Produced in a factory using nuts’

Respondents reported that, having located the NTC warning, it had not always been clear whether someone with a specific nut allergy could eat the product. ‘Not suitable for nut allergy sufferers’ signaled a definite danger, whilst other NTC warnings, such as ‘May contain nuts/nut traces’ or ‘Produced in a factory using nuts’, left many respondents wondering whether they should buy the product. This had been a particular concern of the occasional shoppers who were less knowledgeable about nut allergy and who therefore erred on the side of caution.

One woman described how, when cooking for a nut allergic friend of her son, she had assumed that ‘may contain’ labels were not a problem:

“But when he came to us last, she asked us what we were having for tea and I said, ‘spaghetti bolognese’ because mine loved that, easy to do, didn’t think, so she asked if she could see the jar I was using. It was quite basic. I just buy the meat and a jar of Ragu but it says on it ‘may contain’. I had looked on it to see if there was any nut content but I thought the ‘may contain’ bit wasn’t definite, I thought I was quite safe.” (Occasional shopper, Cardiff)

The phrase, ‘*may contain nuts/nut traces*’ was universally resented. Respondents assumed that the manufacturers thought that NTC warnings were necessary because the food in question had been produced in a factory where food products containing nuts were also being processed and some minute particles might find their way into the non-nut product. This approach was viewed rather contemptuously.

Respondents thought that manufacturers should arrange their production lines to keep the nut and non-nut products completely

separate or they should thoroughly clean the machinery between production runs. Respondents thought that then manufacturers would not need to protect themselves against liability by issuing such labels:

“Well, I think they just cover themselves and they put it on the label just in case. There might be no traces at all. But they are just covering themselves.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“It’s far too easy to write ‘may contain traces of nuts’ on everything, even a carton of milk or whatever, just in case. I think that’s far too easy and I don’t think they should be allowed to do that, I think they should only put it on if there really is a proper risk.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“I think there should be some way of saying to the customer that to the best of our knowledge this has no nut traces. But there is always a possibility that your child could have a reaction you know. Because I think they should take more responsibility about ensuring whether it has or hasn’t.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Again the comparison was made with products that were suitable for vegetarians and the fact that such an equivocal label would be unthinkable:

“I think it would cause outrage if vegetarian products were treated in the same way. Can you imagine vegetarian products with a sign on saying ‘may contain a trace of mince!’” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

Respondents thought that the phrase **‘Produced in a factory using nuts’** was interpreted as companies “covering themselves” just in case someone with a nut allergy suffered an anaphylactic reaction as a result of eating their product. A few respondents mentioned that the precise meaning of this NTC warning was unclear. It might mean that the product had been processed on the same line as products containing nuts or, it could mean that nuts were being handled elsewhere in the factory and would actually come nowhere near this particular product.

The prevalence of NTC warnings had been prominent in discussions. Many respondents felt that the number of NTC warnings had been escalating out of control and manufacturers were seeking to “cover themselves” by putting the NTC warnings on more and more products. Often these were products that had been around for some time and which respondents were used to eating. Respondents felt that, assuming the new NTC warnings were an indication that the product was no longer safe for them to eat, their choice of foodstuffs would be even more restricted. Whilst some respondents accepted this situation, others chose to take the risk by eating the products as they suspected nothing had really changed in the manufacturing process and they would, in all likelihood, not be affected. (See also sections A1.4 and A3.3.)

Many respondents criticised manufacturers for not identifying which nuts the product might have come into contact with. If the common name of nut were stated in the NTC warning those with an allergy to specific nut(s) would be able to discriminate between products:

“But that one time, I can’t remember what product it was on, but it said, ‘May contain traces of peanuts’ because I knew I was allowed peanuts. So I could treat it as though it had no traces of nuts.” (Child with nut allergy)

A3.2.5 Products without Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

On those occasions when a NTC warning could not be found on the pack, some respondents were still uncertain as to whether the product was ‘safe’. They suspected that they might have missed the NTC warning or that certain manufacturers could not be relied upon to warn of possible contamination.

Responses on the occasions when a NTC warning could not be found varied greatly. One person might think that a certain retailer could be trusted because they put NTC warnings on many of their products whilst another respondent distrusted the manufacturer and ignored the NTC warnings for precisely the same reason. Some manufacturers were thought to diligently label products, while another respondent interpreted this apparent patchiness of NTC warnings in a negatively way:

“We know that Marks label everything but Cadbury’s and things, it’s all a bit hit and miss really.” (Young woman with nut allergy)

In the case of one couple, the man with the nut allergy would sometimes reject products without NTC warnings while the woman assumed they were ‘safe’:

“I might be completely wrong but I just take it that if it’s not on there, then it must be okay. That is me, I mean you obviously don’t.” (Partner of man with nut allergy)

Occasional shoppers were particularly confused by not finding information about nut content. In situations where the occasional shopper had been told to buy nut-free products, they looked for more unequivocal statements:

“I remember going round Sainsbury’s and looking at them all and there was hardly any that had about the nuts on... Well, I thought it was very poor. I thought I was going to go in, get a packet of biscuits.” (Occasional Shopper, London)

Respondents frequently asked for a simple positive or negative statement on nut content i.e. a clear statement that declared that either a product contained nuts or it did not:

*“Any information is better than nothing but I think what I would like to see more is people saying you **can** eat it because they are saying you **can’t** again.” (Young woman with nut allergy)*

One woman suggested a symbol to denote the nut-free status of products:

“But then if you maybe make up a symbol that is ‘completely safe’, use that symbol only on goods that are completely free, not confuse everybody.” (Occasional Shopper, Edinburgh)

A3.3 Response to a Range of Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

Each respondent was given a series of eight different, though often similar, NTC warnings which were found on food packaging and asked to group them in terms of the level of risk that they felt they represented.

The shorter NTC warnings were much preferred by respondents:

“You have to keep reading them and then you get ‘what’s that?’ and have to go back to the beginning.” (Teenager with nut allergy)

“Not suitable for allergy sufferers;” that would be the main one there. It’s short but it gets to the point. You don’t have to read a big story with it, ay?” (Woman with nut allergy)

“Well, they are all very similar, they are very lengthy some of them I know. You get bored, not bored, you get distracted reading that. That one is the main one I see all the time. Short and to the point.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Respondents were asked to group the phrases in terms of the level of risk that they felt each phrase represented, in descending order of risk.

Group 1

‘Not suitable for nut allergy sufferers’

‘Due to the methods used in the manufacture of this product, it is not suitable for nut allergy sufferers’

These were taken as being the most serious NTC warnings, making a categorical statement that people with a nut allergy should not eat them. They gave rise to the expectation that the product would have nuts as an ingredient or that there was a very real chance of cross-contamination:

“There’s a good chance of having nuts in that, if that was on the package.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

“This one ‘not suitable for nut allergy sufferers’ – because you know very well it contains nuts... it is like, really a risk.” (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

“Not suitable at all...It must contain nuts...It must have nuts in” (Occasional shoppers, Edinburgh)

Group 2

'Due to the methods used in the manufacture of this product, it may occasionally contain nuts'

This NTC warning was treated with some caution because it mentions 'nuts' as opposed to 'traces of nuts'.

Group 3

'This product may contain traces of nuts'

'This product may contain traces of nuts as it has been made in a factory that uses nut ingredients'

'This product has been made in a production area that uses nuts'

These three NTC warnings were often grouped together because respondents thought that the risk was reduced. Respondents were very uncertain as to what the risk was and resented being left with that uncertainty and having to choose whether to take a risk:

"You shouldn't play Russian roulette with food. You either know that yes, it has got nuts in, I can't eat it, or it hasn't. Not 'it might have', I don't think that it's right." (Teenager with nut allergy)

Group 4

'This product has been made in a factory which uses nut ingredients'

'Produced in a factory handling nuts'

These phrases were viewed as representing a lower risk than the previous ones because it was assumed by respondents that any nuts in the factory were likely to be kept away from the production line where the food had been produced:

"I suppose all these products – 'been made in a production area that uses nuts' and 'may contain traces of nuts' and 'has been made in a factory that uses nut ingredients', they all sound as if to say, there are no nuts in this food, but we are covering our backs because we are frightened of you and I would probably eat it due to the methods used in the manufacture." (Woman with nut allergy)

"'Handling nuts' meaning they could just be in boxes passing through." (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

"It's vague, very vague." (Teenager with nut allergy)

It should be noted that some respondents took the opposing view on 'nut traces' and 'in a factory', seeing the latter as the greater risk if the factory had not been kept scrupulously clean. Indeed, one child had experienced a reaction to a chocolate that had been made in a factory

handling nuts and therefore treated such NTC warnings more seriously than those stating *'may contain traces of nuts'*:

"You know it's made in a nut factory so you know nuts are somewhere along the line, but if they say 'traces', it does imply that it's not as likely." (Mother of child with nut allergy)

A3.3.1 Behavioral Response to Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

It is very important to note that while respondents associated varying levels of risk with the phrasing of the NTC warnings, this did not necessarily reflect in their behavioral response to each. Most responded in one of two ways to the variety of NTC warnings; either they would interpret all NTC warnings as suggesting that:

there was an associated risk for the person with a nut allergy if they ate them

or

there might be an associated risk for the person with a nut allergy and therefore they should seek further information from the pack, in particular from the ingredient list.

We have seen that *'not suitable for nut allergy sufferers'* warnings were widely considered by respondents to be the most serious NTC warnings. However, most of those with a nut allergy recognised that this type of NTC warning were often used where nuts were not shown in the ingredient list but they were possibly (but probably not) present in trace amounts. The symbol introduced by Marks & Spencer incorporating the phrase *'not suitable for nut allergy sufferers'* was identified as a prime example of this practice. This phrase led many 'calculated risk takers' to downplay such NTC warnings and they treated them, not as a 'don't eat' alert, but as an invitation to look further into the type of product and the label. They then made a decision as to whether to proceed:

"I mean, if I saw that, that means 'do read the ingredients'. I mean it is a warning in some ways to check the ingredients and on your head be it, but it doesn't mean you put it back immediately." (Woman with nut allergy)

"I think certain shops, particularly, like Marks and Spencer, if we shop there, we know that there is likely to be a stamp on everything, and you know, we will take that with a pinch of salt." (Mother of child with nut allergy)

For the same reason, these respondents often treated all NTC warnings as an invitation to look further and take account of such factors as:

- the type of product i.e. if they expected it to contain nuts?
- its provenance i.e. was the manufacturer known for its cautious approach?

“All Marks & Spencer’s chocolate, or M&S chocolate biscuits, everything. Marks & Spencer’s are the worst and I do eat all their stuff and they don’t actually have nuts in.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“I would also bear in mind what shop I was in, and you know, because I do think that for instance, health food shops, are very clear, and I think that they are much more discerning, and... I think that it tends to be particular things that are stamped and lots of other things aren’t.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

- their personal circumstances such as:
 - the current apparent severity of their allergy
 - the types of nut they were allergic to and the likelihood of their involvement in the food
 - their state of health (e.g. compromised by other allergies)
 - the perceived security of their circumstances (e.g. at home, with parents, carrying medication/Epipen).

A ten year old boy with a nut allergy (predominantly to Brazil nuts) interpreted all warnings in the same way:

“I would usually treat them all in the same way. Because I mean, to me, they all mean to me ‘May contain traces of nuts’... but it is different ways of saying it. I think.”

And so you might take a risk... if you have had it before..?

“Yes, if I am with mum or dad.” (Child with nut allergy)

A small number of ‘risk taking’ respondents drew an analogy between the various NTC warnings and traffic light signals. Thus, ‘not suitable for nut allergy sufferers’ would be a red light signaling ‘stop’, ‘nut traces’ would be amber and would signal ‘caution’ and ‘in a factory’ would be green and a signal for a chance to proceed:

“I definitely wouldn’t eat those (indicating one group of labels), these I’d test and I’d probably eat those (indicating another group of labels).” (Teenager with nut allergy)

‘Total avoiders’, by contrast, treated all the NTC warnings as a sign to look no further:

“I have just put – ‘it may contain traces of nuts’, ‘not suitable for nut allergies’ and ‘due to the methods used in manufacturing products not suitable for nut allergy sufferers’. So it is all basically ‘not suitable.’” (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

*“Well, to be honest, it doesn’t matter about the methods used. The fact that it is ‘not suitable’ is all we need to know. I feel it boils down to the same things. We wouldn’t take a chance on **any** of these.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)*

Total avoiders particularly liked the ‘not suitable for nut allergy sufferers’ label because it gave such a strong signal and they would prefer to have all labels take this form:

“Not suitable for nut allergy sufferers’, that’s it, they’ve made the decision for you, that’s great, I don’t like it when you have to stand there and go oh, can I, can’t I? so I just don’t.” (Woman with nut allergy)

The “not suitable” NTC warning gave children with a nut allergy a very clear steer:

“I should think that is the ‘safest’ one of the six.” (Child with nut allergy)

“It is short and Christopher understands that.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Most of the ‘Occasional Shoppers’, with their risk averse approach, favoured the single, stronger label:

“But any of them, if you saw that on any foods, you wouldn’t touch any of that anyway. They might just as well say ‘not suitable for nut sufferers’ on all of them, ‘cos that’s the same thing.” (Occasional Shopper, London)

“I don’t know why they have to faff about with it, ‘it may just contain a little bit’ and all the rest of it. I’m sorry, but if you are allergic to something you are allergic to it, it’s not just a little bit.” (Occasional Shopper, Edinburgh)

NTC warnings were, not only important in terms of what may be given to the person with the nut allergy, but also what people purchased for other members of the family. Those who practiced a ‘total avoidance’ policy for the person with the allergy and did not buy products containing nuts for anyone else, might buy products with possible nut traces for other family members:

“I don’t think there is a difference for you, but there is a difference for me in that I and the rest of the family, would buy things produced in a factory handling nuts but not for Lucy to eat. If Penny really likes something and it says ‘produced in a factory handling nuts’, I would buy it for Penny but I definitely wouldn’t buy it if there was nuts in it.” (Mother of student daughter with nut allergy)

A university lecturer, whose allergy had developed in adulthood, made a significant comment about the use of the term ‘nut allergy sufferer’ that is worthy of note. (Which has also been born out by other research into disability issues):

“I actually teach rights, people’s rights and whatever and when you say that somebody suffers from something, it’s almost like they’ve got something wrong with them you know, they have an

affliction in some way. Instead it should say 'Not suitable for people with nut allergies.'” (Woman with nut allergy)

A3.4 The Nut Trace Contamination ‘Banner’

Many pre-packed foods had a ‘banner’ to attract attention to the NTC warning. Respondents were shown examples and were asked to comment on their impact. These were:

Allergy Advice

Allergen Information

Dietary Information

Warning

An exclamation mark

Contains...

The majority of respondents preferred the banner ‘*Allergy Advice*’ which was seen as summing up the key information for which they were looking. Respondents felt that it was relevant for those with allergies other than to nuts:

“That’s exactly what I’m looking for, I’m looking for the allergy advice, that’s perfect.” (Woman with nut allergy)

The banner ‘*Allergen Information*’ was considered to use a more technical language and it was also considered to be unsuitable for children or other people who might never have come across the term:

“Anybody from a different country whose English isn’t their first language or those who have reading problems, if you use threatening words like ‘allergens’ and stuff, they may not understand them.” (Woman with nut allergy)

The banner ‘*Dietary Information*’ was considered by respondents to be too broad and was perceived as being more about general nutritional information. One teenager felt it was more closely associated with things that formed a larger part of the diet like wheat and milk. Others suggested it could be interpreted as information for diabetics or vegetarians. Occasionally it was thought to be associated with calories or fat content:

“Dietary information, you think diet, fat, you don’t think of nuts.” (Occasional shopper, Cardiff)

Respondents felt that the exclamation mark and the word ‘*WARNING*’ drew the eye but because these banners were used to signal other warnings such as the possible presence of bones, they were considered to be less effective.

Respondents thought that the banner ‘*Contains...*’ (in a large box) worked well because it was visible but it was sometimes used more widely for

other potentially problematic ingredients. Therefore, respondents did not feel that it had the same impact as some of the other phrases.

A3.5 The Use of a Symbol

A3.5.1 Spontaneous Recall

When asked about anything they could recall about NTC warnings, many respondents mentioned the roundel used by Marks & Spencer. Respondents did not always recall the words of the roundel accurately but they felt the symbol stood out well.

A number of other nut alert symbols were also recalled by the respondents and variously described as images of nuts, an acorn and seeds. However, respondents were unable to remember the products or brands on which they had seen these symbols.

A3.5.2 Attitude to the Approach Taken by One Major Retailer

The effectiveness of the Marks & Spencer roundel was applauded by respondents for its visibility. Respondents also felt this was due to its distinctive shape and colour:

“I did like the M & S oval one. I liked it having a large amount of blue because you could spot it straightaway.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

“Because it’s nice and clear and it is very good. It tells you everything there. Once you have read that, you see the wee square with the blue and you avoid it.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“I think it does work for me. I always notice the symbol... I think it saves you having to look if you have this symbol.” (Woman with nut allergy)

“I was going round Marks’ today. I got quite adept at just picking something up without even reading it and just looking for that blue oval.” (Occasional Shopper, London)

This particular symbol aided those respondents who wanted to practice ‘total avoidance’:

“Yes you have got to give it to them, I do, I think they.. it saves a lot of hassle.”

“So what is the thing about Marks & Spencer’s then?”

“You don’t have to look hard; you can see it right away.”

“It’s really difficult to put, even though it’s on the back, you know it’s sort of hitting you. Before, you have to really stand there and... If you forget your glasses or contacts or whatever you would just. The others are just not taking it as seriously, but if it happened to you, how would you like it?” (Occasional shoppers, Edinburgh)

However, whilst the approach taken by Marks & Spencer came in for much praise there was widespread resentment amongst respondents that, in certain categories of food such as biscuits, it was difficult to find any product in their stores that did not carry a NTC warning.

The general perception amongst respondents was that the company was taking extreme measures to protect itself at the expense of customers with a nut allergy. Everyone, even the ‘total avoiders’, wanted more discrimination between products:

“I think a lot of the things don’t actually have nuts in them, so I think in some cases – there’s a lot say, in Marks and Spencer’s stuff. Kinnerton’s obviously have a certain production line for things that are nut free, so I think more places maybe need to adopt that so they can give kids like Richard more choice in foods.” (Mother of Child with Nut Allergy)

“Try to give us a bit more choice. It just seems to be going narrower and narrower what we can choose from. And then standardise the label, that nut thing, that is a good one that blue one – but it is over used now.” (Young woman with Nut Allergy)

As we have seen, the ‘calculated risk takers’ treated the roundel symbol as a sign that they should look at the labelling more closely to see if the product deliberately contained nuts or if there was only the remote possibility of a trace of nuts. In the later case they might take the risk and buy the product.

A3.6 Lessons Learned from Packaging

Packaging from four food types was shown to respondents. These were prepared Thai and Indian ready meals, biscuits and, to a lesser extent, breakfast cereals and confectionery. Respondents were asked to talk about their views on the different forms of NTC warning.

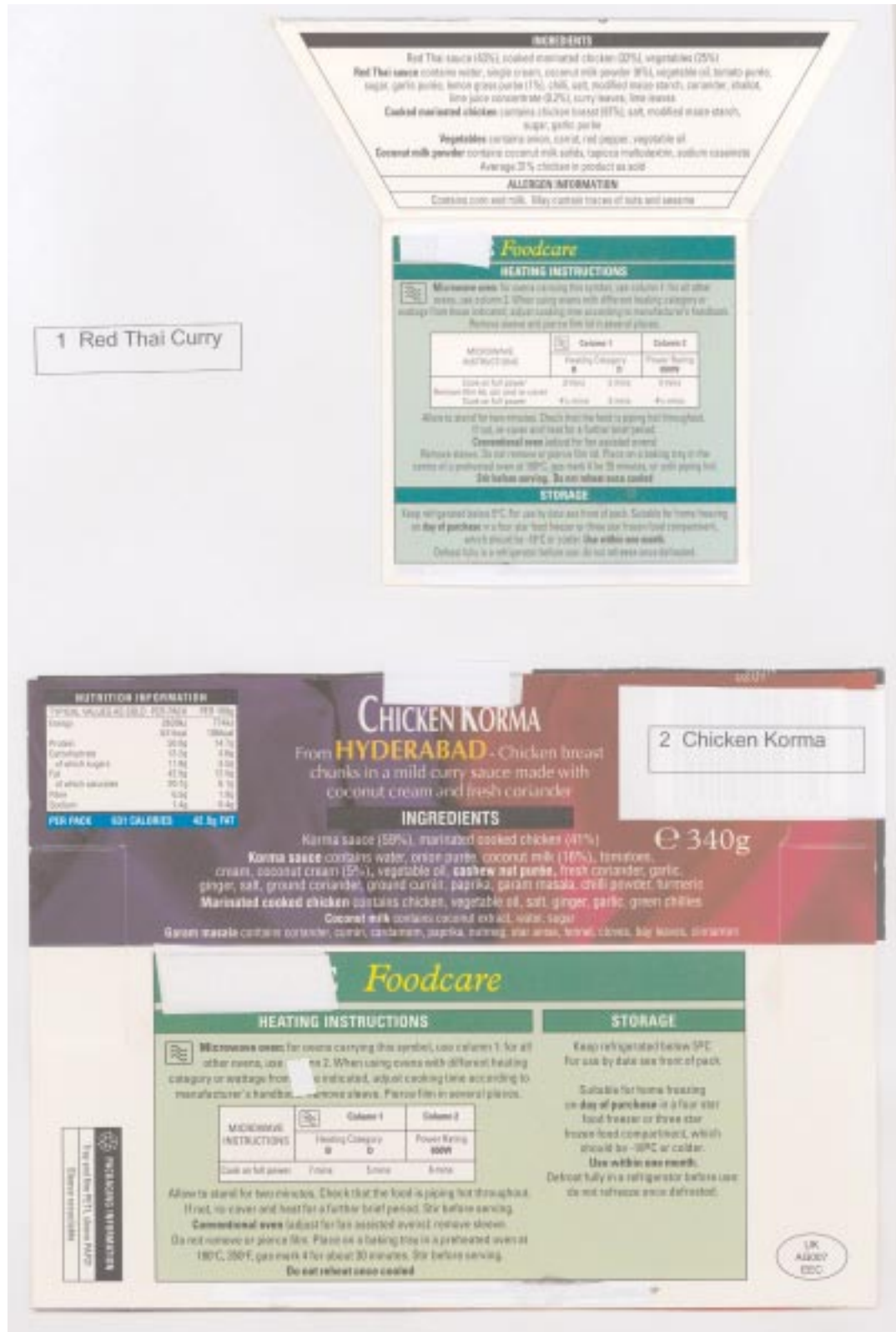
Copies of the relevant packs are reproduced on the following pages. (The numbers are used in the tables to identify the packs.)

A3.6.1 Ready Meals

Most respondents with a nut allergy felt they would avoid any of these products because they would assume that they contained nuts in some form. Table 1 shows respondents comments on the NTC warnings in respect of those elements of the warning that work both well and poorly on each pack.

Respondents criticised the position of some of the NTC warnings, for example, on the sleeve face underneath the pack or on the side of the pack.

NOT TO SCALE



NOT TO SCALE

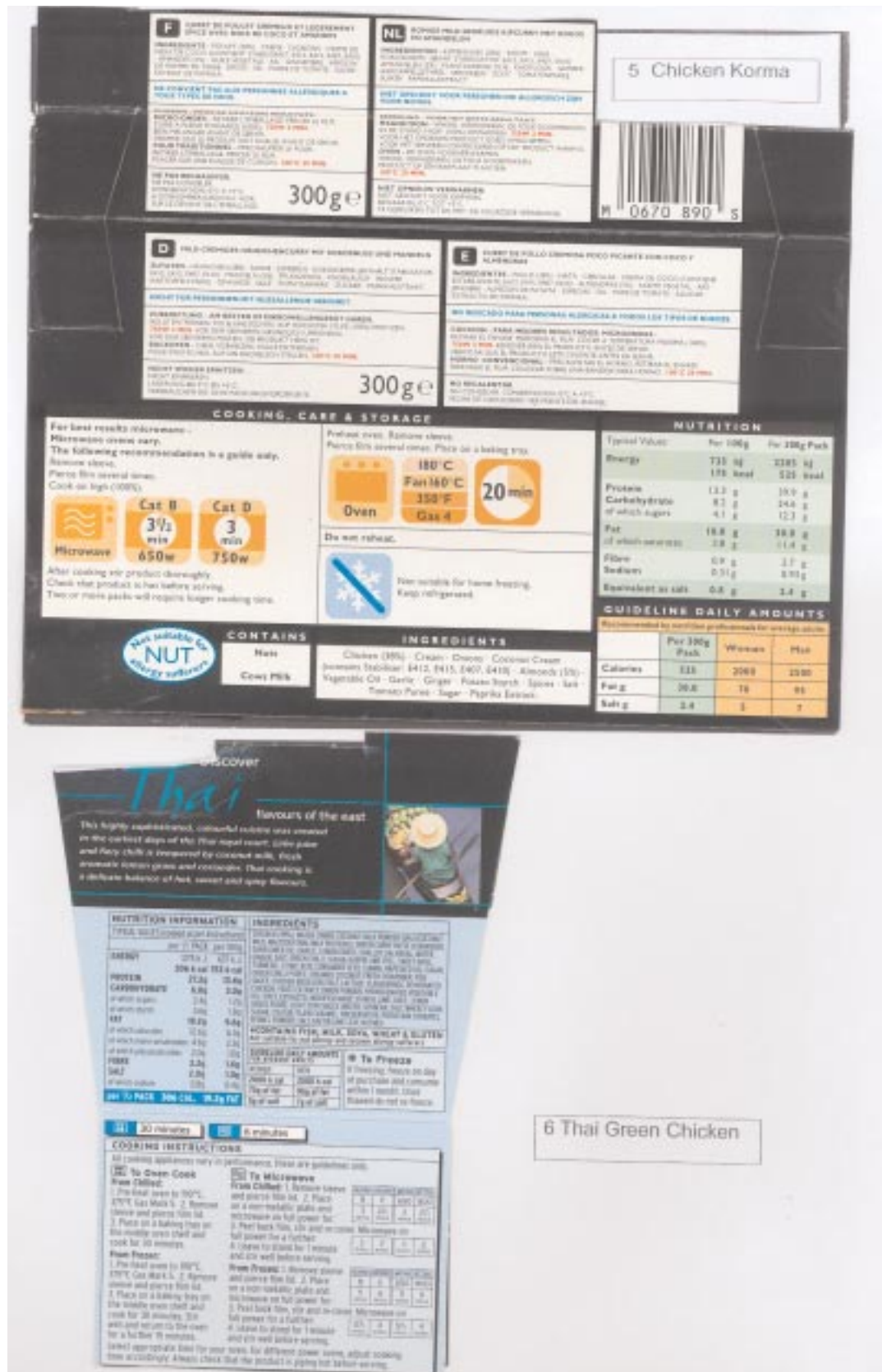
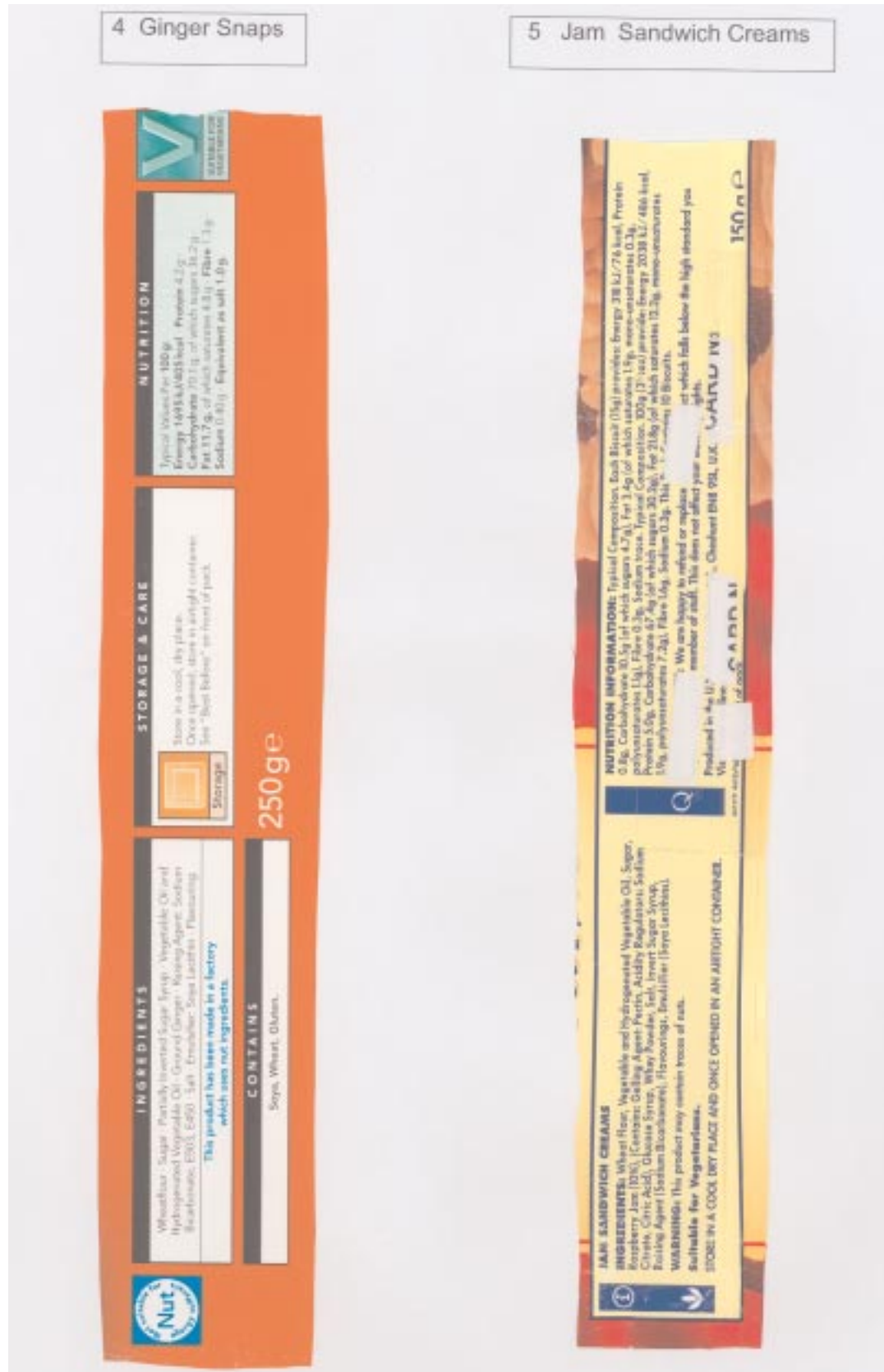


Table 1: Response to NTC Warnings on Packaged Meals

Pack	Works Well	Works Poorly
1. Red Thai Curry	Has a heading and a separate box.	'Allergen Information' did not stand out – could be part of the ingredients. The word 'Allergen' considered to be too technical.
2. Chicken Korma	Highlighted nut-related ingredients.	Not clear why ingredients are highlighted. Most felt a separate NTC warning was also needed.
3. Chicken Pasanda	'Allergy Advice' stood out. Exclamation mark directed the eye. Separate area for NTC warnings. Larger font. Mentioned specific nut - 'almonds'	Needed to read through a lot of other information before finding the allergy information. The eye was be drawn to the word 'Caution' but this actually referred to the possible presence of bones.
4. Vegetable Curry	'NTC warning' was in bold.	Very cramped and difficult to read. In middle of ingredients section. 'NTC warnings' were too general – should mention 'Allergy'.
5. Chicken Korma	Symbol stood out well and declared the word 'nut' and colour. Double warning with 'CONTAINS' box – though it could specify which nut(s).	A lot of information and the blocks of colour Made it difficult to pick out the information. NTC warnings highlighted in blue in translated ingredients but not in the English version. Specified 'all nuts' in translation of the warning, only 'nuts' in English NTC warnings (though almonds listed in the ingredient list).
6. Green Thai Curry	Different coloured background with dark writing.	NTC warning in tiny font under the ingredients. <i>Fish, milk, soya etc. given priority over nuts.</i>

NOT TO SCALE



A3.6.2 Biscuits

Respondents had assumed that in many of these products nuts had been present. This assumption was based on either the name of the product (e.g. ‘Country Crunch’) or the picture on the pack.

The “lumps” in the pictures on the pack of both the Maple Syrup Creams and the Quadruple Chocolate Crunch Cookies were widely assumed by respondents to be pieces of nut. In neither product were nuts mentioned in the product description. However, the Maple Syrup Creams mentioned nuts in small font both in the ingredient list and elsewhere on the pack. Respondents expressed surprise and anger at this:

“Maple flavoured cream filled sultana and hazelnut biscuits, that makes me cross. They should have ‘maple syrup and hazelnut biscuits’ written on the front. I think that’s really naughty and if I was feeling belligerent I would probably take that to customer services and whinge because that is wrong. I am surprised you were able to find this sort of labelling.” (Woman with nut allergy)

Respondents also expressed surprise over the NTC warning on the Jam Sandwich Creams as these were seen as a traditional product that had been around a long time with no ill effects.

Table 2: Response to NTC Warnings on Packs of Biscuits

Pack	Works Well	Works Poorly
1. Country Crunch	‘Allergy Advice’ stands out & directs you to the information. White panel for information contrasted with green b/ground & stands out well.	
2. Quadruple Chocolate Crunch Cookies	Separate panel with different coloured background.	‘Contains milk’ etc. appears above and larger than the NTC warning. Font for NTC warnings too small.
3. Maple Syrup Creams		Despite containing nuts, did not form part of product description. NTC warning did not stand out.
4. Ginger Snaps	Symbol stands out well. NTC warning in the same blue colour as symbol.	Symbol at end of pack where hands could obscure it.
5. Jam Sandwich Creams		NTC warning does not stand out; same font as other information on label – important because nuts were not expected.

A3.6.3 Breakfast Cereals

Respondents were asked to compare a pack of a branded breakfast cereal and an own brand cereal. The branded cereal was an example of a 'traditional' product that had recently been labeled with a NTC warning. A number of respondents were regular eaters of the branded cereal and had always assumed that it did not contain nuts and, therefore, were surprised to find a NTC warning:

"I would still carry on eating this because I've eaten it for years and never have had an effect." (Woman with nut allergy)

Respondents were pleased to find that the NTC warnings on both of the cereal packs were in bold but they felt they were lost at the bottom of the ingredients. Respondents thought it would have greater impact if it were in a different colour.

A3.6.4 Confectionery

Respondents were shown three sample products; a small bar of Swiss chocolate, a pack of chocolate raisins and a Toffee Crisp.

Swiss chocolate bar

Most respondents had not expected to find a NTC warning on this product because it was made only of chocolate. However, two of the respondents commented on the use of 'Swiss' descriptor, they interpreted this as an indicator of the possible presence of nuts, in particular hazelnuts. One of these also associated the retailer of this chocolate with nuts:

"Marks & Spencer's Swiss chocolate, I don't eat it, because I know that they have got nuts in. But the word 'Swiss' always means to me hazelnuts in the chocolate. A good quality chocolate like Thornton's chocolate, all the really expensive stuff that everyone goes mad for, normally the manufacturer of a good quality chocolate I've learned is using hazelnuts. So I don't eat any of the up market stuff." (Woman with nut allergy)

Many respondents found it very difficult to locate the NTC symbol on the thin side of the chocolate bar (they expected to find it on the front or back), although, once located, it stood out well:

"You could just turn around and look at the ingredients and never see this sitting in the corner." (Partner of man with nut allergy)

NOT TO SCALE

Swiss Chocolate Bar



Chocolate Raisins



Toffee Crisp



Chocolate raisins

Respondents expressed little surprise at the NTC warning on the chocolate raisins because of the close association with chocolate covered nuts. Indeed, several people discussed the risk of cross-contamination in this product earlier in the session. The NTC warning was felt to stand out reasonably well, this was considered to be due to the bold typeface and its position in a separate area on the pack. It was felt that setting the NTC warning in a panel would have helped it to stand out. Some respondents expressed concern that the ingredient list was near the top of the pack and as the NTC warning had been at the bottom it could have been missed:

“If you just read the ingredients you would miss that.” (Occasional shopper, Cardiff)

Some respondents questioned whether unfamiliar ingredients such as shellac could have been derived from nuts.

Toffee Crisp

The Toffee Crisp provided another interesting example of a product that some of the respondents had continued to eat despite the fact that it had started to carry a NTC warning. Some respondents ate it unwittingly and were surprised when the NTC warning was pointed out to them.

One respondent, whose daughter had a nut allergy and practiced ‘total avoidance’, explained how her behaviour had changed in response to the appearance of the NTC warnings:

“Again, it is just another example of where, a little while ago, she used to be able to eat them (Toffee Crisp). Now they are putting on the label so she can’t eat them.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

The position of the NTC warning was criticised because it had been printed on the flap, in a small font, following a lot of other information.

Appendix 4. Improvements to Nut Trace Contamination Warnings

A4.1 Standardisation

Given the plethora of options for NTC warnings, it was not surprising that all respondents called for standardisation and the use of a meaningful and easily identifiable NTC warning ‘scheme’ made up of a symbol, a small number of NTC phrases and the ingredient list:

“Just bringing it under, like control it, rather than everyone have a good idea and go off in different directions and then you have got so many different symbols and products – bring them altogether and have one standard symbol.” (Child with nut allergy)

We have divided the views of respondents into the two key areas. The first area concerned increasing the visual impact of NTC warnings whilst the second concerned making the NTC warnings more meaningful, and hence, useful.

A4.2 Increasing the Visual Impact

A4.2.1 Use of a Symbol

Based mainly on the perceived success of the Marks & Spencer roundel, (in terms at least, of its prominence on packs), there was a unanimous call for the use of a symbol as a first line in alerting consumers. Comparisons were also made with the memorability of the standard vegetarian, microwave or freezing symbols on food packaging and the warning on cigarette packs.

The inclusion of such a device was seen as helping all consumers but particularly those with literacy or eyesight issues:

“As a child, you’re trained to look at symbols, you recognise symbols before you start learning to read.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

“I think it would teach children as well from an early age to recognise what they are allowed to eat and what they are not...Oh, definitely...A big red stamp on the front of it.” (Occasional shoppers, Edinburgh)

“If every product used the same logo then everyone would know what they would be looking for.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

Respondents made various suggestions for the design of the symbol. Whilst a few favored the Marks & Spencer symbol others suggested a design based on the word, 'NUT', or a drawing of a nut. Respondents felt this could be placed inside a red warning triangle or have a line through it. It was considered vital that it was a strong colour like red:

"I would do it in red, like a warning sort of colour." (Young woman with nut allergy)

"If the symbol was a bright coloured yellow or blue or even the opposite colour to the packaging so it is very noticeable and even if the symbol had a picture of a big bold nut with the word in the middle of it. Something like that would be really good." (Teenager with nut allergy)

A4.2.2 Positioning of the symbol

Respondents considered that the symbol should be in a prominent position. Many respondents, particularly the occasional shoppers, felt strongly that it should appear on the front face of the pack so that the initial assessment could be made before picking up the pack:

"I feel that instead of a little snippet on the back or bottom of the packet that you really would have to look for, I think it should be as prominent as the name of the product and then everybody could see it." (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

No matter where symbol was placed, respondents felt the most important point was that it should be in roughly the same place on all pre-packed foods.

A4.2.3 Positioning of the Elements and Presentation

Respondents made suggestions for improving the presentation of the NTC warnings, these focused around ensuring that the three key pieces of information; symbol, NTC phrase, and ingredient list, stood out and bore a consistent relationship to each other.

Respondents felt it was important that:

- none of the elements should be printed on parts of the pack that could not readily be seen (such as under the flap, or near the ends of the pack where it would be held obscuring the NTC warnings by the hands).
- there should be a colour link between the symbol and NTC warning.
- a banner such as 'Allergy Advice' should be used to further draw the eye to the NTC warnings and advice about other allergies.
- any warnings about nuts should be given priority over other allergy advice.
- the NTC warning should be separate and stand out from the ingredient list but it should be related to it spatially. Some respondents suggested that the NTC warnings should always appear either to one side of the ingredient list or above it:

“You wouldn’t have to go through the list of ingredients and find a very small warning at the bottom.” (Child with nut allergy)

- the NTC warning, symbol and ingredient list should stand out from the background colour of the pack which may necessitate printing them on panels of a contrasting colour:

“Some sort of contrasting colour because if the packaging was red, a red triangle wouldn’t look good. Something that would be eye-catching and contrasting and perhaps put with the rest of the food information so that you can see it as well.” (Occasional shopper, Cardiff)

- the nut should be identified by their common name in the NTC warning and/or ingredient list.
- the relevant nut-related ingredients should be highlighted in the ingredient list, including any ingredients derived from nuts:

“As an ingredient, that can be dangerous and in fact lethal, I don’t think it should be in the same type, it should be in fluorescent bright pink type or something. It is not just an ingredient, it is a deadly one to some people.” (Teenager with nut allergy)

- the font used for the NTC warning and the ingredient list should be of a size suitable for most people to read without the aid of spectacles.
- the NTC warning and ingredient list should be a mix of upper and lower case fonts.

A4.3 Making the Nut Trace Contamination Warnings More Meaningful

All respondents felt that manufacturers should agree upon, and adopt, a **standard phrase(s)** for the NTC warning.

Respondent opinions on the number and range of NTC warnings were divided. The majority of respondents, not just the “total avoiders”, favoured either a **negative** statement on all pre-packed foods along the lines of ‘*this is not suitable for nut allergy sufferers because it contains nuts (or a specific nut)*’ or a **positive** statement along the lines of ‘*this product does not contain nuts*’ or ‘*this product is nut-free*’:

“But wouldn’t it be nice if it were to say ‘This is suitable’ and then you wouldn’t have that little bit of doubt in your mind.” (Mother of young woman with nut allergy)

“All the stores are trying to cover themselves by saying ‘it may contain nuts and seeds’, but if it was possible, I would prefer them to say it definitely is or it isn’t, because by saying ‘may’, it’s no help to me, the consumer, because you think, ‘well, do I buy it or don’t I? Is it safe or isn’t it?’” (Man with nut allergy)

“Total avoiders” in particular felt that the ‘possible traces’ style of NTC warning should be eliminated because either the machinery and plant were kept free of nuts or there was a definite risk of contamination and, therefore, a ‘not suitable’ NTC warning would apply. The ‘total avoiders’ argued that if manufacturers like the Kinnerton (Confectionery) Company Limited could achieve a nut free environment, then why not all of the manufacturers?

“In the ideal world, knowing that there are far more people now who suffer from this, I would like to see an environment where particularly foods are either packaged or manufactured where there are nut free zones and they can label that with a symbol.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

“I think that they should wash their equipment properly and have proper hygiene standards. I mean hygiene standards are so high in these factories, I hope.” (Woman with nut allergy)

The “total avoiders” would prefer the manufacturers to take on the responsibility for making the decision about the suitability of a product for the consumer with a nut allergy. However, the “total avoiders”, it was recognised that a range of NTC warning would help them whilst shopping for other members of their family who may be allowed products containing traces of nuts.

This contrasts with the view of the “calculated risk taker.” Whilst they would also like to see ‘positive’ nut-free labelling, they were accustomed to making their own decisions about the risk presented by different NTC warnings and their priority was for **less variation in the NTC warnings**. Meaning would come, not only from understanding what the NTC warnings meant in terms of the probability of containing nuts, level of contamination and the type of nut, but also, how many products it applied to. As we have seen, the effect of a low level NTC warning was diluted if applied to many products:

“I think a product should be labelled, ‘This product has been produced in a machine previously used for other nut products but doesn’t include a nut ingredient’...or ‘This has been produced in a factory where nuts have been handled’ – so that you can then make your own assessment really.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

“Again, if they say something like you know, ‘May contain nuts’ could they qualify that by saying ‘Made using same machinery as Brazil nut crack’?... At least you would know that, you know. Some people are happy and they could eat products that have other nuts as long as it’s not peanuts and some people are allergic to different things as well as peanuts, but if you knew sort of what that is. I mean there are some companies who maybe only make, use the products at Christmas time. And the rest of the year they don’t, so if you knew that then it would make it easier for you to decide whether you wanted to try it or not. So a bit more information is what’s needed.” (Woman with nut allergy)

The “calculated risk takers” would like NTC warnings that enabled them and their families to make more confident decisions about whether to buy and eat a product.

A few of the “calculated risk takers” proposed a **grading system** to indicate the level of risk associated with a product i.e. a visual representation of the increasing risk. The analogy was drawn with the chilli peppers used on curries or the number system used with wines:

“A universal warning of like 1 to 5 of how much nut. Some people can just take a little bit of it.” (Occasional Shopper, London)

“3 – ‘has nuts in it. Do not eat it’. 2 – ‘Traces’. Traces could be an actual ingredient, maybe, on purpose kind of thing. It might have like been made with an oil or something, whereas 3 – ‘there’s probably absolutely nothing in it’ but the biscuits they produced before did have something, you know. It’s just really covering their backs.” (Occasional Shopper, London)

“I’d do four, and four would ‘have nuts in’, three, ‘probably have nuts’ in unless you’re not too sensitive, two would be, ‘careful, made in the same factory’ and one, ‘it doesn’t have nuts in.’” (Teenager with nut allergy)

Another suggestion by the “calculated risk takers” was for varying the colour of the panel behind the NTC warning e.g. red for ‘not suitable’, orange for ‘may contain...’ and green for ‘unlikely, but made in a factory handling nuts’.

Respondents suggested that this indicator would then lead the consumer to seek further information from the ingredient list:

“Not so much warn us off – what it would do, it would bring it to our attention so we could then look at the ingredients and it would be for us to say ‘well yes, he can have it’ or ‘no, he can’t’... he could still eat it but it has drawn our attention to it.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

“I think you almost need two signs. One that shows you there’s a definite nut content and you would know straightaway not to even look. And if it says ‘nut traces,’ then you are liable to read a little bit and see whether there’s a possibility whether you would try it or not.” (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

The majority of ‘occasional shoppers’ felt that it was not for them to assess whether a low level of risk was acceptable to the person with a nut allergy for whom they were catering.

Indeed, some respondents found it difficult to accept that some people with a nut allergy could tolerate a certain level of nut contamination:

“If you had a nut allergy sufferer, you’re not going to eat things with nuts in at all or are you? There’s a risk there.” (Occasional shopper, Cardiff)

“It’s like wine, it’s dry, it’s medium whatever, but nuts aren’t like wine, so I feel that a symbol like the vegetarian symbol should apply across the board, not degrees of nuts. And if you want to have a go and see if you are going to be fine when it says ‘contains traces of nuts,’ or whatever the symbol is going to be called, then that is up to you. But I don’t think you should expect companies to put degrees of dangerous goods on a packet. I think if you are properly allergic to nuts, you won’t touch them.” (Occasional shopper, Edinburgh)

Some respondents expressed concern that some may interpret any grading system literally and take more risks than they should:

“I think it would be very difficult because everyone’s situation is different, and what might be mild for someone... and some children can’t even be breathed on... you know, and other children can tolerate a little nibble, so... I think that you know... I just think it would be dangerous because I think everyone has a different tolerance.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Appendix 5: Other Ideas

A5.1 Introduction

Respondents were asked if they had any other suggestions for ways in which people with nut allergies could be helped when shopping or making decisions about food.

The most frequent responses centered on three areas:

- the provision of a ‘nut-free zone’ in supermarkets.
- the need to provide NTC warnings on products other than food items i.e. cosmetics.
- the need for a campaign to inform people with nut allergies, their friends and family, and the public in general, about their condition as well as the new standardised approach to NTC warnings which they hoped was coming.

A5.2 ‘Nut Free Zones’

Respondents were aware that supermarkets often set aside areas for organic and kosher food products and felt the same could be done for nut-free products:

“You can have an area for organic food so you can have an area for nut free food and you just go to that block and get all the food you need for that person in one area.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

“I think it would be nice if there were a section in the supermarket. You have your organic shelf, so why not? Because it is such a common occurrence now, so why not have a section for that?” (Mother of teenager with nut allergy)

Some respondents said that even when retailers stock nut-free products, such as those made by the Kinnerton (Confectionery) Company Limited, the shopper has to search them out – there was no signposting to help find them:

“I find that a lot of like, Tesco’s and different supermarkets, they run, do things like Kinnerton’s products that are nut free, but they don’t actually have a big sign up saying, ‘These products are nut free’ and so it is more difficult for people like me, because I then have to seek through all of these products to find out which is nut free. Whereas if this was highlighted then somebody buying me a present, like a box of chocolates or even like an Easter egg made by Kinnerton’s, it’s much easier for them because it says it’s nut free on it. So it’s easier for your family as well and friends as well.” (Woman with nut allergy)

A5.3 Broadening the Scope

Respondents suggested that NTC warnings should be used to warn consumers about nut content/contamination to products other than food, particularly body care products, toiletries and over the counter invasive treatments such as lip salve and eye drops.

Respondents also suggested that the use of Latin or technical/scientific names for ingredients in both food and non-food products should be discouraged so that the consumer could understand the names. In addition, the types of nuts should be specified.

A5.4 Information Dissemination

The expectation was that, if a new scheme for NTC warnings were to be introduced, then it should be accompanied by a campaign to inform consumers about it:

*“They need to educate people as to what to look for because I remember when Tesco brought their Healthy Eating preparations out, they kept flashing the logo on the telly so you knew what to look for when it was a Healthy Eating preparation. You knew the colour, you knew the shape of the logo.”
(Occasional shopper, Cardiff)*

The importance of the role to be played by supermarkets in the process was often emphasised by respondents. There was an expectation amongst respondents that in-store leaflets would provide lists of nut-free products and, ideally, additional labelling on the shelf edges to identify nut-free products (if not a ‘nut-free zone’):

“It would be a good idea to, on the point of sale, put one of these symbols that maybe people would be aware of after a campaign and then you could see it before you have to read it because you see so many people in the supermarket with their glasses trying to read the ingredients for whatever reason, fat content or nuts. It’s something simple on the point of sale where you’re not having to scan everything.” (Occasional shopper, Cardiff)

A few respondents felt that, whilst there was greater awareness of the potential problems faced by the person with a nut allergy, more could be done to inform the public. This request was endorsed by the parents of children who had suffered from bullying at school as a result of their allergy:

“You could have talks about diabetes and nut allergies and stuff. They could just go into the schools and explain how bad it is and what could happen and tell people how to cope with it as well. Not just your close friends but everyone in the school.” (Teenager with nut allergy)

Respondents would like to see a culture in which they were empowered to feel more confident about seeking information. For example, retailers and restaurants should make it clear through signs and on menus that they would be happy to provide more information.

Respondents felt that health professionals could help more by providing:

- better diagnosis of intolerance of different nuts and regular check-ups:

“I mean, perhaps the consultants that were testing them could actually give parents more of a risk assessment as well.. and say ‘we think your child is’ – you know, ‘you can go this far, but you can’t go that far’. And no one is prepared to say. You know, at the end of the day, it has to be the guardian or the person themselves that says, ‘I am prepared to take these risks.’” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

- more leaflets in doctors’ surgeries
- information about support groups

Finally, in addition to the retailer’s lists of nut-free products, respondents would like to have a definitive and regularly updated list of all nut-free products across brands:

“I have a Coeliac book, which is really useful...because that is updated very regularly, and the Internet carries a daily update which you can alter the book, and that tells me exactly which products I can eat. And that would be quite useful, especially for someone finding out for the first time, and working their way through the process, and when I first was diagnosed with Coeliac, it was like a bible, you know. And I would only buy what was in the book, until I began to feel well, and then I got a bit braver. That would be useful.” (Mother of child with nut allergy)

Appendix 6: Glossary of Terms

Above the Line – This is a reference to advertising using media such as TV, radio, poster and press (as opposed to below the line which refers to direct mail, for example)

Anaphylaxis – A severe allergic reaction involving potentially life-threatening symptoms.

First Line Alert – The means of recognising a NTC warning i.e. a symbol.

First Line of Defence – A means the first action taken in self-medication at the onset of a reaction to a foodstuff i.e. anti-histamine tablets.

NTC – Nut Trace Contamination.

NTC Warning – A panel on the label of pre-packed foods that gives information about possible nut content.

Nut – For the purposes of this report any reference to nut includes peanut (groundnut) as well as the tree nuts (hazelnuts, Brazils, walnuts etc) unless otherwise stated.

