

## Food Standards Scotland – Allergens campaign case study

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**Name:** Eilidh Davidson

**Age:** 17

**Location:** Glasgow

**Allergy:** Tree nuts

It's a busy time for 17-year-old Eilidh from Glasgow. Being half-way through her sixth year at school, it's almost exam time – something she takes very seriously with plans to study law at university next year.

“School is pretty intense at the moment,” said Eilidh, “but I also love travelling and swim competitively.”

However, another serious part of her life is her food allergy to tree nuts which she has lived with since 2016. Tree nuts can include almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, chestnuts, hazelnuts, pecans, pistachios and walnuts.

Eilidh said: “The first reaction I had was at my uncle's wedding, which wasn't even that long ago! The caterer had sprinkled pistachio nuts over the top of one of the dishes and when I ate it my tongue began to swell up and I felt sick. It was quite scary but luckily wasn't a bad enough reaction to go to hospital.

“After this I had skin tests at the hospital and the doctor confirmed I was allergic to tree nuts. When I eat a nut, my body reacts straight away and my lips and tongue go all fuzzy and itchy.

“I now have to carry an allergy pen with me, but luckily I've never had to use it. However, as my symptoms seem to be getting worse as I get older, I may have to in the future.”

At 17, going out with friends and having fun should be part of life, and for Eilidh this is no different. She has, however, learned to manage her food allergy and realises the importance of letting other people know about it.

“I don't really get embarrassed about having a food allergy,” said Eilidh, “I just think of it as something that I and lots of others deal with. Over the last few years, I've figured out easier ways to deal with my allergy at restaurants which can be a big help.

“At first, I would remind the waiter before each course, but it began to get repetitive and I felt like I was being a pain! Now what I tend to do is tell the waiter who takes us to the table about the allergy and ask for an allergen menu. This is basically like a checklist that tells you what allergen is in each meal and it gives me extra confidence when I am ordering. However, not every restaurant has one of these.

“One thing I would recommend is to always let your waiter know about your food allergy. Even if the normal menu has allergen warnings, they will often make an effort to avoid cross-contamination with food that you’re allergic to if they know about it.”

Having only known about her allergy since she was 14, it’s taken a while for Eilidh to adapt to certain aspects of her life, although now she’s able to manage it confidently.

She explained: “One of the hardest things at the start was remembering to bring my allergy pen every time I went out. For me the thing that helped was getting a nice handbag that I wanted to take with me, and I always have somewhere to put it.

Another challenge Eilidh can sometimes encounter is having to explain to people what exactly she is allergic to.

“Most people assume my nut allergy means peanuts,” said Eilidh, “when, in reality, it is tree nuts, so things like pistachios, almonds and cashews. I’m not allergic to peanuts at all!”

With university and a move to Edinburgh after the summer, Eilidh is already thinking about how best to equip herself for the future. She is, however, very excited and can’t wait to start the next chapter of her life.