

## Warning: Do Not Feed This Family

By Julie Berry, MetroWest Daily News - Whenever I go through a fast-food drive up window, my six-year old orders a cheeseburger, no pickles. If I say he can only get a snack, he asks for fries, no pickles. Or a milkshake, no pickles. The other day he asked me for a ham sandwich with mayonnaise. No cheese, he said, and no tuna. Do you make ham and tuna sandwiches? Neither do I.

Gone are the days when children could be taught to eat what's set before them, and no questions asked.

My son with dairy allergies has learned to ask about everything he's served, "Does it have milk?" It's heartbreaking but sweet. Offered a birthday cupcake, he asks, "Does it have cheese?"

My older son with religious zeal once asked, when offered lemonade, "It doesn't have any vodka, does it?" Then again, my brother was serving him the lemonade so this was a valid question.

Food allergies are a sliding scale in my house: if my husband eats celery, he'll get a stomachache. If my son eats dairy, he'll puke. If my husband eats shellfish, he'll die. The latter two, you'll notice, do not represent good table manners.

And then we have food aversions. Since my last pregnancy, I can't stand real vanilla. It used to be one of my favorite flavors. Nothing like a dish of vanilla bean Breyers. Now it tastes to me like it was made from rotten milk. I can't stand it. But other than that, I'm easy to please.

It's not that my boys don't eat. On the contrary, they fight over the lump of fat bobbing at the top of the can of baked beans. They eat microwaved popcorn then tear open the bags and lick the butter-flavored oil off the lining. With all their dietary restrictions, they have to go to extremes to get their daily dose of calories, I suppose.

A while ago my husband experimented with a diet that was supposed to solve all your problems. Eliminate headaches. Improve energy. Enhance sleep. Only problem was, it required eliminating all corn, nuts, seeds, and dairy from your diet. Do you have any idea how ubiquitous corn syrup and corn starch are? Only if you've had to eliminate them.

And nuts and seeds - that means peanut oils, cottonseed oils, canola oil (which is made from rapeseed, a name which really makes me wonder).

Between food sensitivities, allergies, and diets, it's a wonder we don't all run around with IV drips feeding our veins directly. When people voluntarily torment themselves, with their Atkins and South Beach and Whatnot diets, I throw up my hands in despair.

How can anyone break bread together anymore?

I used to dread dinner invitations. Well-meaning friends would ask about our allergies so they could accommodate us. I wanted to say, "Just slay a pig with your bare hands and roast it in a hole in the ground. Then give us each a fork. Can't go wrong."

But now I don't sweat the invitations. So please, invite the six of us to dinner. We'd love to come. We'll bring the entertainment with us. So long as you serve lemonade, no vodka, cupcakes, no cheese, and milkshakes, no pickles, we'll lick the platter clean.

Literally.

Julie Berry lives in Eastern Massachusetts and writes humor columns for the MetroWest Daily News, where this story was originally printed on December 9, 2006. Her latest columns can be viewed on her website, [www.jbwriter.com](http://www.jbwriter.com), and her wide array of book reviews (especially for kids) can be enjoyed from her blog, "What Julie Berry is Reading."