

Parsely App (MVP)

Interviews Summary

Overview

Five interviews were conducted with participants ranging from 24–48 years old. All participants have food allergies with varying levels of sensitivity. A food allergy scale based on intolerance level (3 = low, 5 = medium and 7 = severe) was discussed. Each person must avoid anywhere from two to six different food allergens. None are severe. One individual has an autoimmune condition where diet affects inflammation levels. Three males and two females were interviewed. Four out of five participants have had food allergies for 5–10+ years. One person for 18 months.

Each interview began with general allergy related questions, their experiences navigating mealtime, dining out and cooking preferences. We discussed methods used to search for recipes, to find ingredient substitutions and if apps or websites are utilized. The final block of questions was about their needs (i.e. more convenience, peace of mind, reputable resources, etc.).

Highlights

- All participants cook about 75–80% of the week
- Two participants have more experience cooking than the others
- All participants occasionally use recipes and substitute (or omit) ingredients allergic to
- 3 out of 5 rely on ratings when trying new, allergen-safe recipes
- All participants rely on general Google search to find specific ingredient substitutes
- All participants experience varying inconveniences and frustrations during mealtime
- Meal decisions: eat anything and face symptoms vs avoiding altogether and sacrificing taste
- One participant has used a label scanning app in the past
- Another participant has used a gluten-free recipe app in the past
- Due to poor features, buried content or general difficulty, app use was discontinued

Pain Points

- Sometimes challenging to find allergy-safe ingredient substitutes for certain recipes
- Need more convenience to find recipes tailored to having multiple food allergies
- Finding reputable allergy-safe recipes and ingredient substitutions
- Inconvenienced when searching for allergy-safe recipes due to pop up ads on websites
- Two participants have had instances of unintentionally eating foods they shouldn't due assuming it was safe
- Two scenarios where both partners in a household have different food allergies. Cooking becomes difficult (time preparing variations of the same dish, buying two variations of the same product, etc.)
- Time consuming to read food labels to ensure allergens are avoided (especially with processed foods, packaged products, condiments)
- Difficulty finding reputable ingredient substitutes for recipes (backed by drs, nutritionists, dieticians, etc.)
- Due to store unavailability or cost, sometimes end up omitting a specific recipe ingredient. This affects meal quality
- Difficulties finding specific ingredients at regular grocery stores, resulting in going to ethnic markets that are not local
- Label scanning apps are not always reliable and/or results are inconsistent
- Experience mealtime monotony due to limited diet or eating similar meals knowing they are tolerable and used to making

- Products can be allergy-free in one area, but contain another allergen (egg substitutes use pea protein, what if someone is allergic to both egg and peas?)
- There can be inconsistencies with allergen labeling across products. Sometimes they aren't clearly listed or confusing
- Certain allergen-free food products are either costly or unavailable at regular grocery stores
- Grocery shopping sometimes limited product availability, store is too far
- One user ordered a special ingredient online (due to unavailability at local stores). It was expensive and ended up not liking it. Wasted time and money.
- Dining out can be difficult finding allergy-safe menu items, end-up ordering bland meal
- Need more establishments that provide allergen specific menu options
- Dining out and following a strict diet can be socially isolating
- Visiting the restaurants website to plan ahead of time... sometimes difficult to find allergy menu. They're often missing or are illegible.
- Inconsistencies in allergy menu availability and clarity across different establishments

Potential Opportunities

- Allergen-safe recipe app with database library containing a granular filter for safe ingredient substitutes, taste preferences and user ratings. Feature that also provides products/availability at local grocery stores.
- App that identifies allergens in any recipe and provides safe substitutes. Backed by medical professionals and user community for credibility.
- App with robust library of allergen-free recipes. Feature that suggests substitutions for hard-to-find ingredients (availability at local grocers or online purchase options).
- App only available to people with similar allergy diagnosis. Includes user community feature for sharing recipes, ingredient substitutes, etc. Vetted by medical professionals for credibility
- App with full database of restaurant allergy menus
- App service that delivers safely prepared (sanitized, cut, chopped, not frozen) fresh produce and ingredients. Eliminates long preparation time when cooking
- App that provides virtual cooking classes tailored to managing food allergies

Conclusions

The interviews revealed that multiple challenges exist when navigating mealtime. Time consumption is a major factor regarding food preparation, carefully reading labels, searching for reputable allergen-safe recipes along with substitutions for specific ingredients. Convenience is also a factor relating to higher cost and availability of certain allergen-safe products at regular grocery stores. Dining out also presents concerns where some establishments lack allergy menus or full transparency. Social isolation can occur when adhering to dietary restrictions. Lastly, websites and apps lack granular filtering control for varying food allergies. Overall, it has revealed there is a need for apps to address these challenges.

Next Steps

- Define a clear problem statement, POV and HMW
- Create user personas such as the busy professional allergic to dairy, the family cook with a spouse intolerant to wheat, the social foodie with a soy allergy, etc.
- Generate ideas for an app that addresses one feature well