

Flying With Dietary Restrictions? Increasingly, That's Not a Problem

When it was time for dinner on my July flight from Lisbon to New York, a flight attendant brought me my special request gluten-free meal.

5 I was diagnosed with celiac disease almost three years ago, and this sort of request for what airlines describe as a special meal – in this case, steamed sea bass with vegetables, gluten-free bread and fruit salad – has been a constant on my frequent air travels ever since.

But on that flight and on a slew of ones before it, I noticed that several other passengers, more than I had ever seen before, had ordered special meals, too. [...]

10 Have requests for special meals really gone up? It turns out they have: Both international and domestic airlines report an increase in special requests in recent years, and many are trying to accommodate them by broadening their special meals categories.

15 American Airlines, for example, significantly expanded its category last July when it went from offering seven types of special meals to passengers on long-haul international flights to 14. A low-sodium meal option was added, as was a halal meal prepared without any pork or alcohol, and a bland one prepared with limited seasonings for those with sensitive digestive systems.

20 Russ Brown, American's director of in-flight services, said that the airline decided to offer more kinds of special meals because passengers were repeatedly asking for them. "People are a lot more specific with their diets today and try to be healthier overall and kept requesting meals that we didn't have," he said. [...]

Historically, fliers have ordered special meals because of religious or medical reasons. So why are they asking for them more today than they did before?

25 Airline experts say that it now may be a matter of personal taste and also because the current generation of travelers adhere to diets that have proliferated in popularity.

By Shivani Vora, adapted from *The New York Times*, Aug. 14th, 2018