

Managing Food Dilemmas During the Holidays

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The holiday season may trigger fond memories of grandma's homemade pies and other wonderful foods and smells from your childhood. Food plays an important part of many special rituals, memories, and ethnic traditions - especially during the holidays. However, if you are struggling with any kind of food allergy, health issue such as diabetes, or a weight issue, thoughts of grandma's pie may trigger anxiety and trepidation during the holiday season. Christmas might not seem the same if you can't enjoy that "special dish" with your friends and family.

In my own extended family, for instance, we have family members with severe food allergies, dietary restrictions due to Celiac disease, diabetes, and a few family members who are dieting. It can be overwhelming to accommodate all the various family members' dietary needs, not to mention regular holiday stress! In addition, it may be very difficult for those knowing that certain foods will be "off limits" during this celebration season.

The following ideas incorporate strategies recommended by the Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network. These ideas may help manage the food dilemmas for you and your loved ones this holiday season.

If you are the guest:

- Inform your host of your needs and offer to help with shopping, preparation, etc. Explain the importance of your food requests and the serious health consequences of not following your special diet (i.e. inform them of your diagnosis or diet, and provide information as necessary).
- Be prepared for a lack of understanding - enlist the help and support of at least one family member or friend who understands your unique situation.
- If it's a child who has the dietary restrictions, prepare them to answer questions and refuse food as appropriate.
- Bring your own food and/or snacks in case there is nothing available for you to eat.
- Prepare a "special dish" tailored to your needs, or enjoy a special treat at a later date.
- Try to be empathetic to your host's situation; it may all be new to them!

If you are the host:

- Inquire guests as to special food needs or requirements as far in advance as possible.
- Ask for their help in menu planning and food preparation.
- Be informed about your guest's situation - for instance, do some research on-line.
- Have at least one dish you know is safe for your guest (if your niece has a tree-nut allergy, make your special dish without nuts and put a different snack in the nut bowl this year.)
- Try to be empathetic to their situation -- it is not easy to deal with food restrictions!

The best way to avoid problems is through proper communication and preparation. Try to take care of as many issues as possible before the event(s). Be aware that some family members may never understand the gravity of your situation regarding food. Have a plan for possible scenarios that may arise (Aunt Ruth is always going to push you to eat her cookies!) and practice your response to them. Say a prayer and ask others for their prayers and support. May God bless you during this precious time of year.

For more information, tips and ideas, please refer to www.foodallergy.org

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