

Ask Leyla: Any tips for sticking to my therapeutic diet over the holidays?

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Q: I'm on a strict therapeutic diet for an autoimmune condition and am worried about being able to stay on my plan through the upcoming holidays. How do I join in the festivities without wrecking my diet? I don't want to risk a relapse of symptoms, but I don't want to be a party pooper either.

A: This is an excellent question and one that's on more people's minds than we think! You are not alone in this dilemma. *Medical Nutrition Therapy* requires strict diet compliance in treating medical and autoimmune conditions. I've witnessed excellent health outcomes when the patient is able to adhere 100 percent to a nutrition therapy plan.

I understand your concern about staying on your eating plan to keep yourself well. Most people will relax their diet, cheat, or altogether blow it celebrating the upcoming holidays, but that's really not an option for you given your health issues and the comprehensive treatment program you've been prescribed. Here are some tips that can help you navigate the forbidden terrain of holiday eating and imbibing.

First, *never* arrive to the event or dinner hungry. Have a satiating snack or even a full meal before attending the festivities (even if the event is in your own home). That way, with your appetite in check, you can pick and choose appropriate dishes that won't disrupt your eating plan.

Next, offer to bring a prepared dish. Then you can enjoy the meal you prepared and everyone else can enjoy a serving of it too. You don't even have to mention that your dish is specifically gluten or dairy-free (or free of other eliminated foods). This works great for potlucks, by the way.

If you're able to implement these ideas but the people around you are inquiring why you're not eating this or drinking that along with them, remember, your medical/health status is no one's business but yours. Avoid that awkward conversation by saying you had a big lunch that day and it was rather late as well, and you're not that hungry. Then address the forbidden food you were handed and push it around the plate with your fork like the supermodel that you are. Change the subject and enjoy your company. No one

will be the wiser!

To your health!