

Ask Leyla: Diet compliance and your busy life; Navigating your therapeutic diet



Q: I'm on a strict therapeutic diet for an autoimmune condition and am worried about being able to stay on my plan *and* maintain a social life. How do I navigate this 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 blow it altogether when an opportunity arises—like a business lunch, brunch or dinner with friends, or a wedding. 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 this dilemma of eating well and attending to your busy social life.

First, *never* set out to your planned engagement hungry. Have a satiating snack or a full meal before attending the event (even if it's taking place 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.

If you're attending a dinner party, 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 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!

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