

Holidays Around the Corner: *How to balance taking part in traditional meals but avoid an IBD flare*

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As the temperature drops in Minnesota, we are reminded the holiday season is right around the corner. It's a time when many begin to focus their attention on plans to see extended family. It is also a time when there is often an extended assortment of sweets, treats and traditional meals lined up on the table. Someone living with inflammatory bowel disorder (IBD) may often describe many so-called comfort foods eaten around the holidays as producing a feeling afterward that is anything but comfortable.

Food avoidance is common for those with IBDs^{3,4,5} but completely skipping the dinner table or gathering this holiday season does not have to be the only alternative to avoid a flare. Each person with IBD should work with their health care provider or dietitian to create their individualized diet plan, especially if you have disease with strictures or narrowing of the intestinal tract as this can further limit what you should eat⁴. A completely restrictive diet is usually unnecessary when in remission unless prescribed by your health care provider^{4,6}. Contrary to common belief, when in remission there is little evidence to support a need to completely restrict all types of fiber or residue (such as whole nuts, seeds, raw fruits or vegetables) and lactose (unless lactose intolerance is always present)⁵. Restricting foods is more likely to lead to over-indulging⁶. During active disease, foods with insoluble fiber and lactose may, however, contribute to worsened symptoms along with other potential trigger foods like processed meats, red meat, sugary foods, artificial sweeteners, high fat foods, caffeine, or spicy foods.^{1,2,4,5}

There are several ideas to help navigate mealtime during the holidays. Some general suggestions for those with IBD to avoid a flare include:

- Try to eat small meals instead of one large feast.¹
- Enjoy cocktails alcohol free especially during active disease^{1,3,4}; alcohol free options now include a wide variety from wine to craft beers and more.
- Ask the host if you can bring an appetizer or shareable snack to have available if your gathering tends to take part in grazing throughout the day.⁶
- Consider hosting!
- Ask your health care provider if you can take anti-diarrheal or lactase tablets around the holidays to lessen the effect of some indulgences.⁶
- Ask if you can prepare a side dish that is often laden with one of your trigger foods and identify a way to alter or substitute the offending ingredient.⁶

According to IBD specialist and registered dietitian Brittney Roman-Green, there are specific suggestions to adapt your holiday recipes to balance taking part in traditional meals while also veering off the path and eating trigger foods or those less tolerated with IBD.⁶ For example:

On the menu...

Try an alternative such as....

Prime rib or ham	Roasted turkey or chicken
Mashed potatoes, candied sweet potatoes or scalloped potatoes	Use olive oil to substitute the butter, roast the potatoes or have mashed butternut squash
Stuffing	Make it gluten free if you need, or exchange olive oil for butter
Green bean casserole	Cooked green beans, roasted squash or carrots
Pumpkin pie	Exchange the sugar for dates or date syrup, use an air fryer or use vegan version

A restrictive diet for a prolonged period of time can lead to malnutrition with nutrient deficiencies with overall poorer health and well-being^{1,6}. Health leading up to the holiday season can be just as important as diet choices on the day of the celebration. Consistent, managed IBD can better support your body through any potential flares that do occur, and there is no research that blames dietary choices as the single reason that leads to an IBD flare.^{2,5,6}



Careful planning, knowing how to approach what is on the holiday menu and taking care of your health and wellness leading up to the holiday season can give more confidence with Crohn's or colitis. Keep a food diary this year to help refine your plan for the coming years to learn your body's do and do not list of foods.^{1,4,6} May your holiday season allow for less stress about what is served *on* the table and more time spent enjoying the company of those seated around it.

Resources

1. Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. (2021). What should I eat? <https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/diet-and-nutrition/what-should-i-eat>
2. Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. (2020). Causes of flares. <https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/emr/emr-ibd-education-tool/causes-flares>
3. Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. (2019). Managing IBD flares and symptoms. <https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/managing-flares-brochure-final-online.pdf>
4. Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. (2019). Diet, nutrition and inflammatory bowel disease. <https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/diet-and-nutrition-brochure.pdf>
5. Crohn's and Colitis Foundation. (2017). General nutritional considerations for IBD patients: Education resource for healthcare providers. <https://www.crohnscolitisfoundation.org/sites/default/files/legacy/science-and-professionals/nutrition-resource-/nutrition-fact-sheet-for.pdf>
6. Roman-Green, Brittany. (2021, November 18). Navigating eating around the holidays with IBD. [Webinar Series]. Crohn's and Colitis Foundation.
7. Mayo Clinic Staff. (2011). Ulcerative colitis flare-ups: 5 tips to manage them. <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/ulcerative-colitis/in-depth/ulcerative-colitis-flare-up/art-20120410>.