Enjoying Thanksgiving With IBS

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Top Tips for Thanksgiving With IBS

Irritable bowel syndrome is unpredictable, and that alone can interfere with fun and festivities. But getting caught up in what might happen can distract you from preventing problems in the first place, so take a step back and create an action plan to deal with IBS threats on Thanksgiving.

How to Plan a Tummy-Friendly Thanksgiving Meal

If you're in charge of the feast (or at least some of the fare), there are a few helpful substitutions that can make a traditional Thanksgiving meal more IBS friendly. Rest assured, these adjustments won't interfere with taste or texture:

- **Add soluble fiber –** Don't shy away from the stuffing – refined flour is actually full of gut-friendly soluble fiber, which can help regulate your digestion (as long as you don't have a gluten sensitivity). Since chestnuts, apples and mushrooms are also high in insoluble fiber, a classic turkey stuffing may be the best side dish for you.
- **Sub out dairy for alternatives –** Dairy is a top trigger for IBS symptoms, and even if the lactose doesn't bother you, the fat probably will. Luckily, you can get creamy mashed potatoes or a silky smooth white sauce without the milk and butter. Soy milk and rice milk are great alternatives to try, since rice and soy are packed full of soluble fiber, and their neutral taste can easily take on any sort of flavors you desire.
- **Serve up some healthy and tasty sauces –** Fresh cranberry sauce, apple sauce and herb-infused dressings can bump up the flavor without heavy, fatty ingredients. In this way, you can prepare lean meats, steamed veggies and other lighter dishes without compromising on rich flavor. If your guests demand gravy, strain the fat and use cornstarch to thicken the rich broth instead.

Avoid Triggers but Stay Satisfied

Begin by narrowing down your personal triggers; the better you know your stomach, the easier it is to navigate the spread. There are also a few techniques that can help you get the most out of your meal, without unpleasant consequences:

- **Take a peppermint supplement before you sit down to dinner –** Peppermint (in the form of an enteric coated peppermint capsule) will increase bile production, helping the body to digest fat – and Thanksgiving dinner is never short on fat. Peppermint also has anti-spasmodic properties, and can help relieve the pain that comes with abdominal cramping.

- **Be conscious of your pace –** Chew well and break often. The slower you enjoy your meal, the more time you give your GI track to adjust, and the less likely you'll swallow excess air and wind up with gas pain. Try to put down your fork between bites, and engage in conversation over the course of the meal to slow down.

- **Prepare with tea –** As many IBS sufferers know, herbal tea can be a pretty powerful tool for protection and relief. When Thanksgiving rolls around, pick out your most helpful tea (or teas), and sip on them over the hours leading up to the gathering. Ginger is good for nausea and fennel tames bloating, but you may find some other herbs also work well.
- **Stay away from the main culprits –** Caffeine, fried food, alcohol and cruciferous veggies can all cause heartburn and acid reflux. Pass on the beer and wine, and keep the broccoli and cabbage to a minimum. High fat foods can be a terrible irritant, so be careful when it comes to rich stuffing, fatty meat, and butter.

Surviving Embarrassing Episodes

Despite your best intentions, accidents do happen. If you worry that your symptoms are getting the better of you, here are a few quick and clever steps to help you take care of the problem:

- **Scope out the bathroom –** As soon as you arrive at the gathering, get to know the facilities. You may want to let the host know of your concerns – they'll probably sympathize with your dilemma, and maybe offer up their master bathroom if you suddenly need a toilet.
- **Bring backup –** If you have medication for gas, be sure bring it along with you. If you're prone to diarrhea, bring along an extra pair of underpants, just in case. Simply knowing that you have a plan for the worst case scenario can put your mind – and bowels – at ease.

Stress has a major impact on IBS symptoms, so do your best to relax before the big day, and stay calm and content throughout the party. Practice deep breathing or visualization techniques to keep you mind and body happy. Stress relieving techniques can go far to ensuring a healthy and happy holiday. If you've never tried cognitive behavioural therapy, you may find that a few simple techniques can keep your symptoms at bay.