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from your Hannaford Dietitian

Allergy-Free Party Planning

Holidays are a time for entertaining with good friends and good food. But for those with food allergies and sensitivities, holiday parties may be a source of uncertainty and stress.

Whether you're attending a holiday party with a food allergy or you are hosting a gathering for guests with food allergies, there are a few simple tips to help alleviate some of the worries that go along with holiday parties.

What You Can Do as a Host:

1. Inquire about food allergies or intolerances. When planning a party, the first thing you can do when sending out invitations is ask questions about what your guests can or cannot eat.
2. Review the menu & be specific - including brands and sources of foods you're planning on serving - with the allergic guest. Save package labels if there is a possibility that they could include unsafe ingredients.
3. Say "yes" if your guest offers to bring allergen-free dishes and desserts, and ask them to bring enough for all to share.
4. Be prepared and have appropriate safe, delicious and allergen-free treats on hand that everyone can enjoy together. You will want everyone to feel included.
5. Keep the focus off food. For parties, create a special theme that is meaningful and fun for all. The same goes for activities - instead of cookie decorating, consider crafty activities or games.
6. Be sensitive. Don't bring unnecessary and unwanted attention to your guest's food allergies or intolerances.

Most important tip of all: Remember the real reason for the holidays. Take advantage of this opportunity to spend time with family and friends, and focus on people rather than food.

What you can do as a Guest:

1. Communicate & educate in a positive manner and well in advance. As a guest, it is your responsibility to let your host know if there is anything you can't eat - and how serious the situation is. Don't let a fear of inconveniencing the host stop you from disclosing a list of restrictions. The host wants everyone to feel included, regardless of what can be eaten (or not). Hosts are more apt to be insulted by a guest who doesn't eat what is served than by a guest who shares food restrictions as soon as the dinner invitation is accepted.
2. Go first. If the party is buffet-style, be the first in line to avoid any potential cross-contamination such as mixed-up spoons. If this is too awkward, you can also ask if the host can set food aside for you before serving.
3. Contribute to the meal. Offer to bring an addition to the menu that you can enjoy and share with everyone else. That way, there will definitely be something safe for you to eat.
4. Keep it simple. When loading your plate, stick to simple, whole foods - like plain fruits, vegetables and meats that haven't been processed, coated or mixed. Avoid sauces, dips, marinated items, casseroles and desserts unless you know for sure what's in them.
5. Don't take over - it's not your party. Don't try to replace your host's famous German Chocolate Cake that has been a holiday tradition for generations.
6. Follow up after the party with a thank you. A hand-delivered note would be great, or even a little gift.



Interested in learning more? Our registered dietitians hold classes, have on-the-sales-floor nutrition demonstrations and do healthy store tours. They can give you the information you need to make the healthy life style changes you want. For free nutritional advice, you can also email a private message to our staff registered dietitian at hannaford.com/dietitian.