## Holidays and food go hand in hand

If you follow a gluten-free lifestyle or will be with someone who does, the holiday season can present challenges.

Gluten is the protein in many cereal grains (wheat, rye, barley, spelt, kamut or triticale and foods that contain them) and can cause unpleasant side effects for those who are gluten sensitive.

One in 133 Americans has celiac disease triggered by protein gluten. If you live gluten-free—whether you have been diagnosed with celiac disease or gluten intolerance or are one of many who feel better avoiding gluten—you don't want to feel different or left out of holiday celebrations.

Here are some tips to ensure that special dinner can be enjoyed gluten free:

—Though poultry is a safe choice, many turkeys are injected with gluten-containing broth to plump up the turkey during cooking. Check the ingredient list to be certain the turkey was not processed with ingredients containing gluten.

—Stuffing can safely be made with gluten-free bread. Combine wild rice with cranberries, apples and gluten-free sausage for a different twist, or try a gluten-free corn bread stuffing.

—Gravy can be made with wheat-free or gluten-free bouillon cubes and can be thickened with cornstarch, arrowroot flour or ground flaxseed meal.

One key point to keep in mind is that hosts often unknowingly cross-contaminate food while preparing for a meal, but with pre-planning, it's not difficult to provide safe choices for gluten-free diets.

—Serve food buffet style. Put gluten-free foods on a separate table rather than co-mingling all dishes. Dipping a wheat cracker in the hummus instantly contaminates it for the gluten-free guest. Be certain serving spoons are not switched between the separate tables.

—During meal preparation, keep gluten-free foods separate from other foods. Something as simple as a dusting of flour over what was intended as a gluten-free dish or contaminating serving and eating utensils can trigger digestive problems for the gluten-sensitive person.

—Read all ingredient labels prior to meal preparation and keep the labels for gluten-free guests to check if they wish.

—Ask other guests to bring ingredient labels or food packaging for gluten sensitive guests to check. As the guest you can ease the stress of menu planning for a special diet for your host. Offer suggestions to simplify navigating gluten-free food preparation.

—Offer to provide a list of safe foods: fruits, veggies, beans, low-fat dairy products, seafood, poultry and lean meats, nuts and seeds. Rice, potatoes, corn, oatmeal and quinoa are gluten-free. Stress that labels need to be read to be certain they were not contaminated during processing.

—Provide a list of typical gluten containing foods such as soy sauce, salad dressings and beer.

—Offer gluten-free alternatives that can easily be substituted in many recipes. For example, use rice noodles in place of wheat noodles in pasta dishes.

—Suggest a recipe complete with a list of safe ingredients, including where they can be purchased to save time for your host who may want to prepare a dish to fit your dietary restrictions.

—Bring a gluten-free dish to the party that everyone can enjoy—and be cautious that your gluten-free dish is not unknowingly contaminated during the event.

—In place of the usual hostess gift, order a gluten-free dessert you can bring or have delivered in advance.

—Pack your own mini-meal. Make it simple—a roasted game hen and several side dishes you can enjoy without worry.

—Consider eating in advance to alleviate your own concerns about what will be safe to eat. Let your host know you are excited for the party but want to minimize stress for both your host and yourself. This strategy works well if you are not well acquainted with your host.

You may even amaze your friends and family with the tasty, abundant choices you offer. Though the holiday season can be fraught with stress—whether guest or host—these tips can help refocus gluten-free stress onto enjoying people and time together.

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