

Tips to Safely Celebrate Thanksgiving with Food Allergies

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TAKE ALL FOOD ALLERGIES SERIOUSLY • TRACE AMOUNTS OF FOOD CAN CAUSE A REACTION

Thanksgiving **at Home**

Thanksgiving is an important time to connect with friends and family and to reflect on all you have to be thankful for. You will need to plan in advance to ensure everyone is safe since the holiday itself centers on the traditional Thanksgiving dinner. Below are some options to help you celebrate Thanksgiving safely. The best option for your family will depend on your child's age, developmental level and individual medical history. Be sure to check our "safety tips" before planning any food celebration.

The benefit of hosting at your home is that you have control over what is being served and you can decide how to handle food that guests may bring to your home.

- Plan to make only allergen-free safe foods. Check KFA's Safe Eats™ recipes and our food blog for allergy-friendly recipes. Inform friends and family of your plans to serve only safe foods, and what the allergens are that will not be served. Have a list of acceptable foods or other items for family and friends to contribute (e.g., beverages, ice, fruit, paper products).
- Allow some unsafe foods but have plenty of safe options available for your child. Put in place precautions [see "Safety Tips"] to keep your child safe.

Thinking Beyond Food: Fun Thanksgiving Traditions

- Play a game of flag football.
- Play board games, charades, or cards.
- Participate in a local fun run or 5K.
- Go for a family walk.
- Watch the Thanksgiving Day Parade, football games or favorite movies.
- Have children collect leaves.
- Go to a local parade or craft fair.
- Go see a movie at a local theater.
- Bring in a favorite family photo to share and ask each person why they picked it and the story behind it.
- At the dinner table, share what you are thankful for.
- Put the children in charge of taking photos and videos of the celebration. Have them present their handiwork.

Safety Tips

- ✓ **Wash hands before and after eating or handling food.**
- ✓ **Prevent cross-contamination in preparation and serving.**
- ✓ **Read the labels of all food ingredients.**
- ✓ **Prepare and cook safe meals first. Seal them and set aside. Then make unsafe foods.**
- ✓ **Keep unsafe foods away from safe foods when preparing, serving, and storing.**
- ✓ **Use separate serving utensils for each dish. Be careful not to mix them up.**
- ✓ **Wash all prep areas and eating areas with a paper towel and commercial cleaner. (Sponges and rags can be a source of allergens).**
- ✓ **Try to keep food isolated to one area of the home and clean up thoroughly after the meal.**
- ✓ **Before the meal is served, make a plate for your child to avoid cross contact.**
- ✓ **Depending on your child's age, you may want him/her seated close to you during the meal. Ensure that those eating nearby will be careful not to accidentally spill or share unsafe foods.**
- ✓ **Keep unsafe foods out of reach of young children with allergies.**
- ✓ **If food will be served and eaten throughout the house, bring packages of wipes to keep near the food and encourage everyone to wipe hands after eating, though encouraging them to use soap and water is best. Walk around periodically to dispose of any uneaten food or dirty plates and napkins.**

Thanksgiving **Away from Home**

Any celebration outside of your home needs to begin with a conversation with the host. It is important to talk about foods that will be served, your child's allergies and any necessary safety precautions. Below are several options for visiting someone else's home for Thanksgiving. You will need to decide what works best for you and your family.

Cross contamination (also called cross contact) can happen when an allergen inadvertently touches a "safe" food during preparation, cooking or serving. Avoid passing allergens to safe foods by washing your hands and your child's hands with soap and water before handling food. Gel hand sanitizer may be effective at reducing viruses, but it has not been shown to be effective at removing allergens from hands. Prepare and serve foods on clean surfaces with clean utensils and other kitchen items. Cooking items should be scrubbed with hot, soapy water, and surfaces should be wiped with a commercial cleaner (e.g. Formula 409 or similar product).

- Offer to work with the host to create a safe menu. Often a food can be made safe simply by adjusting the recipe. Offer to prepare the food with the host and to help with label reading and preventing cross-contamination.
- Offer to bring a few "safe" food dishes to share with the rest of the family. Plate your child's food before everyone else and keep "safe" foods separated from unsafe foods to avoid cross contamination. (Don't forget to pull out some leftovers too. Keep them in a sealed container labeled with your child's name).
- It may not be helpful to suggest adjustments to the food planned by the host. Instead, bring a safe meal for your child to eat while there. Pack lots of safe snacks and desserts, too. Discuss this with the host first.
- Although unlikely to be necessary, as a last resort, if you do not feel that the situation will be safe for your child, don't go. Some families feel most comfortable staying at their own house for Thanksgiving dinner and offer to have the rest of the family over to their home for dessert or a family activity. This would help ensure that you serve safe foods your whole family can enjoy.

Celebrating at School

If your child's school chooses to celebrate Thanksgiving, here are some tips for ensuring that it is safe and fun for everyone. It is important to work with key school staff and families for the holiday. That way, you can plan holiday festivities in alignment with your school's wellness plan.

Parents: Talk with the teacher in advance about making the celebration safe and inclusive for your child. Start this conversation early and with a written plan.

Teachers: Please do not allow children with food allergies to share food. Foods from others may be a source of unintended allergen exposure. The CDC recommends the use of non-food rewards when possible. This promotes inclusiveness in the classroom. It also decreases the risk that a student could be exposed to an allergen. Celebrating without sugary, high-fat foods and sweets is also healthier and consistent with the wellness policies in place in many schools.

References 1. Centers for Disease Control. 2013. Voluntary Guidelines for Managing Food Allergies In Schools and Early Care and Education Programs. Retrieved online October 5, 2014 from http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/foodallergies/pdf/13_243135_A_Food_Allergy_Web_508.pdf. 2. Massachusetts Department of Public Health. 2010. Data Health Brief: Epinephrine Administration in Schools. Retrieved online October 5, 2014 from <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs...-health-brief-10.pdf>. Written in collaboration with Gina Menett Lee, MEd. Reviewed by medical advisors November 2014.

Ways to Celebrate without Food

Thanksgiving is the perfect time of year to reach out to others in need. Examples include:

The class could work on projects to help people in your community.

Children can gather clothing, used books, or canned food items to donate.

They could also create crafts for donation to decorate local shelters, food pantries, nursing homes, or community centers.

Children could work in small groups to write a short skit about Thanksgiving. They could dress up and perform the skits for family and friends.

Children could also write about what they are thankful for and share it with the class and then their families.

Additional Thanksgiving Activities

Create homemade cards for extended family.

Create a Thanksgiving poem to read to those gathered on Thanksgiving Day.

Write an acrostic poem using Thanksgiving words.

Make napkin rings out of construction paper and decorate with stickers or illustrations.

Decorate paper place mats for Thanksgiving.

Make Thanksgiving paper bag puppets.

Make a hand print turkey.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For additional ideas on school celebrations, see KFA's list of non-food rewards.

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