

Family Events and Food: How to Survive After Weight Loss Surgery

What do the following things have in common: 1) Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter, 2) birthdays, weddings and baptisms, and 3) the annual family reunion? All of these events typically include enormous amounts of food. The food itself sometimes becomes the primary focus of the event.

Holidays seem to bring out the Wolfgang Puck in all of us. We prepare and elaborately decorate all sorts of delectable foods and lavishly present them to our loved ones. People “ooh” and “ahh” over artfully displayed creations. Crowds gather around the food table at the parties. Family birthdays, weddings, and religious festivities include cakes and scrumptious morsels too good for everyday cooking. Honestly, wouldn't you rather taste Aunt Martha's famous secret-family-recipe ribs and baked beans than talk to old Aunt Martha at the family reunion?

Yes. The ‘family food fest’, more respectably referred to as “a nice family gathering at which we enjoy one another's company and celebrate a special event” can be a problem for people who have had weight loss surgery. Hopefully, you enjoy one another and celebrate the reason for the gathering at your family events but sometimes it seems the food takes priority over people. So how do you still go to the celebration and avoid being bombarded with, and tempted by the food? Here's how:

- 1) Focus. Remind yourself, in the days and hours leading up to the gathering, that you are going to celebrate a person or a situation. Decide that you are going to focus your attention on that person and situation. This will give you a mental focus while you're there and keep your mind off of food. For example, at a birthday, make it your job to greet

every person at the party and have them say something special about the birthday person. Write down every nice comment and give it to the celebrant as a gift. At holiday gatherings, go prepared with short articles or stories about that holiday and how it is celebrated around the world. Read the stories to people or talk to individuals about what you've learned. Focus on the event. The food is not the reason for the celebration, nor is it the thing to be celebrated.

- 2) Attitude. It's easy for people who have had weight loss surgery to go to a special event for someone or to celebrate an event and end up having their own private pity party once they get there. Avoid slipping into such a place of misery by forbidding yourself to entertain thoughts like, "Why does everyone else get to partake of the goodies and I can't?" Thoughts like this lead to your feeling miserable, which result in your being grumpy. Take the gift of a positive attitude to the event and present it to yourself throughout the celebration: "I am here with my family and I am grateful that I can now enjoy their company rather than focus on the food."
- 3) Plan and Prepare. Eat before going to the event. Be sure to eat whole foods, full of protein so you are full and have eaten food that will keep you satisfied. If you are going to be at the gathering for a long time and will need to eat while you are there, take a healthy snack like a protein bar with you. If need be, take some healthy food such as grilled chicken and cottage cheese along to have for a meal.

- 4) Mindful Tasting. If you simply cannot go without having some of Aunt Martha's ribs and beans or Uncle Frank's famous cheesecake, then make and follow a few simple rules for yourself: a) you can sample three foods from the family smorgasbord; only three, b) your sample must be the size of a silver dollar (you are only *tasting* the traditional family foods), c) don't eat all three at one time; rather, spread the tasting of the three foods out over the course of the event so that you can enjoy each one more fully.
- 5) Reward Yourself. Plan a non-food 'treat' for yourself later in the day or on the day after the family gathering. You can reward yourself for making your food plan and following through with it. Be sure to share that you successfully survived a family gathering/family food fest after having weight loss surgery. Use your success to inspire other weight loss surgery patients who are planning to go to their next family event!

Family events can have a whole new meaning for you when food is no longer the major point of interest. Use your time at these gatherings getting to know your family members better rather than focusing your attention to what's on the table. Who knows? Aunt Martha may be an incredibly interesting person if you get to know her!

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