

Breathe Easy This Thanksgiving: Tips For A Healthier Holiday Meal

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Thanksgiving is a time to gather with loved ones, reflect on our blessings and indulge in delicious food. However, for those with respiratory conditions, such as asthma or COPD, the holiday feast can

present unique challenges. As a Registered Respiratory Therapist, I want to share some practical tips to help you enjoy Thanksgiving while keeping your breathing easy and your lungs healthy.

1. Portion Control is Key

It’s tempting to pile your plate high with all the Thanksgiving favorites but overeating can make it harder to breathe. When your stomach is overly full, it can press against your diaphragm, limiting its ability to move freely and making breathing feel labored. Instead, enjoy smaller portions and savor each bite. You’ll feel satisfied without compromising your lung function.

2. Stay Hydrated

Drinking plenty of water throughout the day helps keep mucus in your airways thin and easier to clear. Aim to drink water or herbal teas instead of sugary sodas or caffeinated drinks, which can dehydrate you. If you want something festive, try a splash of cranberry juice in sparkling water for a refreshing treat.

3. Choose Anti-Inflammatory Foods

Certain foods can support lung health by reducing inflammation in the airways. Incorporate side dishes rich in antioxidants, such as sweet potatoes, green beans and cranberries. Leafy greens like spinach and kale, often used in salads, are also excellent choices. These nutrient-dense options can complement your turkey while promoting overall respiratory health.

4. Be Mindful of Dairy

For some people, dairy products like creamy mashed potatoes or cheesy casseroles can increase mucus production, making it more difficult to breathe. If you’re prone to this issue, consider opting for dairy-free alternatives or limiting your portions of these dishes. Substituting almond or oat milk in recipes can be a great way to enjoy the classics without the respiratory burden.

5. Avoid Overly Salty Foods

High-sodium foods, such as processed stuffing or canned gravy, can

cause your body to retain water, potentially leading to bloating and discomfort. This can also make breathing more challenging for individuals with compromised lung function. Opt for homemade versions of these dishes where you can control the salt content or look for low-sodium options at the store.

6. Watch Out for Triggers

Thanksgiving meals often include dishes with strong spices or heavy fragrances that might irritate sensitive airways. If you have asthma, consider avoiding dishes with ingredients like black pepper, cayenne, or strong aromatic herbs if you know they’re triggers for you. Be sure to carry your rescue inhaler, just in case.

7. Eat Slowly and Relax

Eating too quickly can lead to swallowing air, causing bloating and discomfort that may make breathing harder. Take your time to chew thoroughly and enjoy the conversation around the table. A relaxed atmosphere can make your meal even more enjoyable and less stressful for your respiratory system.

8. Don’t Forget the After-Meal Walk

After the big meal, take a gentle walk to help with digestion and promote better lung function. This can also reduce the chance of post-meal bloating and give you a chance to connect with family and friends outdoors, where fresh air can do wonders for your lungs.

Thanksgiving should be a time to celebrate and enjoy yourself but a little mindfulness can go a long way in keeping your respiratory health in check. By making thoughtful food choices and listening to your body, you can breathe easy and focus on what truly matters—spending quality time with loved ones.

Wishing you a healthy and happy Thanksgiving!