

6 Tips to Survive the Holidays

There's snow on the ground and coffee shops have moved from pumpkin spice lattes to eggnog lattes. Christmas lights are up on your streets, the malls are getting busier, and on the radio, holiday songs are playing on repeat.

December is here, and with it, the holiday season.

What does that mean for those of us on a keto diet? Platter after platter of carb-filled temptations—from gingerbread and candy canes to shortbread and sugar cookies.

What do you do? Keep calm and keto on.

You can survive this holiday season without compromising your ketogenic lifestyle with these 6 simple steps.

1. Give your host a heads up.

A lot of people think it's rude to notify their host of dietary needs ahead of time. You certainly don't want to be seen as an extra hassle for someone who's volunteered to prepare, cook, and serve the holiday spread. But if you stay quiet, you risk showing up to a table full of food—with absolutely nothing you can eat. Not a good situation for you, and likely an embarrassing moment for the host, too.

Making your host aware of your dietary restrictions well in advance is part of the bargain when you're invited to someone's home to eat. The best way to navigate is to be as polite and helpful as you can. There's no need to get into a detailed explanation of what you can and cannot eat. Keto dieters can simply mention a low-carb diet. If your host is open to adjusting the menu to add one or two keto-friendly dishes, direct them to a few appropriate (but simple) recipes and ingredients. Most hosts find this extremely helpful.

On the other hand, not every host is up to the challenge of navigating dietary restrictions. If you mention your diet and your host still seems perplexed at the idea of cooking without carbs, reassure them that it's not a problem and proceed to tip number two.

2. Offer to help prepare or bring a make-ahead dish.

Depending on your relationship to the host, you can try offering to help prepare the holiday meal on the day of the festivities. Come armed with recipes and ingredients. This is a great way to show the host a few keto-friendly dishes for future events and gatherings.

A lot of family get-togethers operate on a potluck basis anyway, so offering to bring a few delicious keto dishes isn't such a far-fetched suggestion. The more dishes you bring, the more choice you'll have when it's time to eat. Appetizers, side dishes, and desserts are great options. Not to mention, letting others in on what you're eating—chances are they'll be surprised at how great everything tastes—can make your diet seem less confusing and scary to your family and friends.

Not sure what to make? We have lots of keto-friendly recipes for you right here.

3. Be prepared for backlash.

In a perfect world, everyone would be happy that you've made the choice to change your lifestyle for the better. They would congratulate you on your progress, and try to be accommodating and sympathetic to your new dietary needs.

We all know—many of us from experience—that that's not how it really works. While there will be those who support you on your keto journey, others may have difficulty understanding why you're abstaining from Grandma's famous mashed potatoes or Aunt Betty's legendary gingerbread cookies. You may even find yourself on the receiving end of some teasing or bullying regarding your food choices.

Anticipating negative reactions and preparing a thoughtful response is the best way to deal. If not, you're setting yourself up for disappointment, especially if it's your own family pitting themselves against you. The sooner you shut down nastiness, the better. Don't be afraid to stand up for yourself, but remember that a simple explanation is enough to justify your personal dietary choices. Focus on health-based reasons, and leave it at that.

Avoid taking attacks personally. If someone offers you a slice of cake, they probably just don't know or understand which foods have carbs and which don't. But don't tolerate anyone who insists you should break your diet, and don't fall for just-this-once reasoning. Stand up for yourself now, and by next year your keto lifestyle will be water under the bridge.

4. Focus on what you can eat.

Choose to see the glass as half-full. There are thousands of keto-friendly recipes out there, many of which aren't all that different from popular holiday dishes—think turkey, ham, asparagus, or green beans. When you focus on how much you can eat, there's no need to get worked up at the thought of missing out on a few carb dishes and desserts.

5. Know what you can and cannot eat.

At some point over the holidays, you'll probably find yourself staring at a dish you didn't prepare

yourself wondering whether you can eat it. Stick to the foods you're sure about. Meats, cheeses, pickles, plain vegetables, fatty dips, olives, and salads are generally okay. Dishes and sides such as stuffing, casserole, gravy, sauces, and desserts you didn't make yourself are likely to have carbs.

It's okay to ask when you're not sure, but you probably don't want to be that annoying person who asks the host for an ingredient list of every single dish. If you've alerted the host of your dietary needs, it's their responsibility to point out the dishes that fit your needs. Of course, not all hosts will follow that simple courtesy. If that's the case, limit yourself to the dishes you've brought and those that have been made by someone who understands what you can and cannot eat.

Finally, watch out for the foods that seem keto-friendly but are actually packed with carbs. Bread, desserts, and casseroles most likely will have carbs, but other carb-based dishes are less obvious. Some examples? Salad dressings, baked beans, tomato-based sauces, devilled eggs, almond and soy milk, yogurt, and sugar-free cookies are sneaky sources of carbs.

6. Above all, keep in mind the reason for the season.

As a keto eater, this is the most important thing you can do over the holidays. Though some people might tell you otherwise, the holidays are not about eating a lot of food. Yes, most of us like to celebrate special occasions with food, but having the opportunity to feast is not the point. If you're fixated on food as the focal point of the holidays, you're missing the substance behind holiday traditions. For many, the holidays are also a time to reflect on the past year while looking ahead to what the next will bring.

Food may be part of the festivities, but it's not everything. Enjoy the true meaning of the holidays and spend some time with your family and friends!