



Reinventing Holiday Meals

This year has presented a new version of nearly everything in our lives, and holiday meals are no different. Have no fear, it IS possible to stay safe from COVID-19 while honoring your favorite traditions, and creating brand new ones. While this article outlines ideas specific to adjusting meals, the CDC is a fantastic source of information on COVID-19 safety, and they even have a page specific to holidays:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/holidays.html>

With Whom, and How, Will You Celebrate?

If your usual group is geographically distant and unable to get together, find new ways to connect with them and/or reach out to local friends and neighbors. Even if you won't be eating the meal at the same table as your "guests", you can connect with an online meeting platform (many are free and easy to use) or by exchanging food, gifts, and merriment without much contact. If your table will consist of just 1-2 people, see if a neighbor or local friend would be interested in splitting the menu and exchanging portions of each dish.

Adjusting the Meal(s)

In this age of all things being different, it can be easy to be caught up in wanting to make everything the same as it usually was. It might feel like you can't live without EVERY traditional side dish, but it can be far more depressing to have a large buffet of food and no one to eat it, than it is to prepare fewer items in the first place. If you can adjust your recipes to half (or smaller) of the usual size, that's a great option for getting a variety of must-have dishes. Regarding meat proteins, consider preparing a smaller cut of meat (example: turkey breast or Cornish hen instead of a whole turkey or chicken). Call your local butcher to get other creative ideas based on the number you'll be cooking for and your favorite options.

Now it's time to narrow down the menu. Make a list of ALL of the foods you traditionally serve, and sort them by which ones you can't live without. Be honest with yourself here. If you always have your great-great-grandmother's mashed potatoes recipe because that's always been served, even though you don't love it, maybe this year you can go without it (she'll never know!). Start at the top of the list, and when you get to the point where you feel it's enough food, skip

whatever items are left. If you choose to still make ALL the things despite fewer mouths to feed, that's ok; just be mentally prepared for the leftovers, and have a plan for how to safely store and use them.

Take advantage of the low-pressure year to try something new! Order takeout from a local restaurant, or pre-order traditional holiday meal items from your grocer or a local restaurant/chef. If you have always wanted to "lighten up" the meal, add different sides, or use healthy recipe substitutions, now is your chance to experiment.

Combining New and Old Traditions

In the words of Prince Phillip of England, "Change does not change tradition. It strengthens it. Change is a challenge and an opportunity, not a threat."

This is where the fun and creativity come in. If most or all of your typical group is local, try a "pick-up train": Participants meet up in their respective vehicles at one house, each with empty containers to pick up food at every house. The train of cars drives to each house where portions of each menu item are dished out. Alternatively, cooks can package up their creations in advance and bring to one spot to exchange food so each family unit gets a little of everything. These ideas lend well to a COVID-safe group photo!

To keep cooking fun with fewer cooks in the kitchen: ask in-home family members to help in new ways. Toddlers and young children can wash produce, dump pre-measured amounts of ingredients into bowls, and stir. Older kids and adults can read instructions aloud while you cook, chop produce, and be given more independent tasks to perform. This new fun opportunity may open the door for more kitchen help in the future. If you're alone or live with someone who is unable to help, put on some lively or festive music, or video chat with another friend or family member who is also prepping food alone.

As with so many other events this year, remember the option to connect with your family and friends using a video chat platform, for a meal or even the New Year's countdown. If some family members aren't familiar with the technology, schedule a time to call them on the phone and walk them through it in advance, and practice with a test chat. Set up your device in a place where you can see the others and they can see you – a



stack of books at the opposite end of the table often works. Then, enjoy the company, and don't forget to take a screenshot of the group so you can always remember this unique 2020 holiday.

This year has changed all of us, in some irreversible ways. Forming new holiday traditions can be a way to

honor the "newness" of this year while leaving a positive mark on our lives for years, and maybe generations, to come.

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