

Family Meals Focus

The Ellyn Satter Institute Newsletter

Holiday eating in the time of COVID

by Ellyn Satter, Nutritionist and Family Therapist

How can we make this Thanksgiving warm and festive in these times of COVID quarantines? It's such a wonderful day of sharing food traditions and relaxed times with those we love. What does your family do that says "Thanksgiving?" (Keep in mind that a family is what you are when you take care of yourself.) My (Ellyn Satter's) sweet memories: getting the turkey in the oven, then cutting hair while we listen to Arlo Guthrie's *Alice's Restaurant*. Applauding the kid's skit that they have worked on all day. Surprising the grandchildren with pumpkin pie for breakfast. Others' stories: Breaking the wishbone with another person; the one with the big piece gets the wish. Canned cranberry sauce—don't even *think* of substituting the homemade version! Currently, I enjoy planning the menu to involve my guests in cooking: Somebody makes pies, somebody peels, somebody mashes, somebody chops and mixes. I sit and direct traffic (I am, you know, 78.) It works just as well with 2 or 3 people as it does with 20. Cooking together makes for laughs and conversation. If I am alone, I make a festive meal and cook *exactly* what I enjoy most!

That is joyful cooking, what about joyful *eating*? Why not prepare all year long to comfortably eat and enjoy Thanksgiving dinner by becoming Eating Competent? This reader was inspired by our pre-COVID [Holiday Eating Success Story](#) to reflect on her own celebration of getting the good-food-bad-food monkey off her back and giving herself permission to eat.

A reader's story

"Thank you for the important work you do and thank you for being a voice of reason in the midst of all the "obesity epidemic" insanity. I used to think I had to live in a house completely devoid of sweets. If I made cookies, I would eat a fair amount of the dough, a bunch of the finished cookies, and then bring whatever was left into work the next day (or send them with my husband to his work) because if they stayed in the house, I would eat every. single. one. I thought I just had a 'weakness for sweets.' That there was something in my DNA that made it impossible for me to resist the siren song of a brownie or fudge. I grew up in a house where you had to eat your salad first at dinner, then finish your vegetable before getting any additional main course. Dessert was occasional and strictly rationed. Ice cream only on Friday nights, and only a small amount.

Our children show us how . . .

"Enter a son with a food allergy and an allergist who told us never to force him to eat a single thing, since anything could be an allergen. [ES: Enlightened allergist!] Eventually I found Ellyn Satter and the Division of Responsibility in Feeding. Trusting my son to eat what he needed was extremely difficult at first . . . because I didn't trust myself. I thought I had to eat 'healthy' food in order to



deserve sweet stuff. January meant starting yet another regimen of salads and baked chicken. Fast forward several years, and I've come to a place of peace with my food. I can coexist with brownies. I love making cookies with my kids, and we've even had a container of chocolate chip cookies sitting on the counter for as long as a week! I realized I absolutely HATE eating out of season. (Salad? in January? What was I thinking?!) Cold weather means warm, comforting food like soups, stews, chili, and hotdish. Warm weather means lovely light dishes of salads, or 'snack dinners' - cut up veggies, cheese, bread, and fruit served like a picnic. I threw away some Halloween candy this year because it was things the kids rejected and I don't like. Two years ago, I would have eaten it anyway just because it was *candy*. I am active, and I let my hunger help me fuel that activity, rather than feeling like I have to only eat a select few 'healthy' foods."

Holiday blessing

Whatever you have to eat, why not sit down to Thanksgiving dinner hungry and confident that you can eat as much as you want of food you enjoy? Then you can stop, knowing another meal is coming and it surely will include some delicious leftovers!