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### **At Holiday Time, Health is the Main Course - Food is Just the Side Dish!**

EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP, NJ – Whether you celebrate Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanzaa or the arrival of the Winter Solstice, one thing is certain. You can expect to be invited to many holiday gatherings that will include food – and lots of it!

However, if you are 3-4 out of 100 people with celiac disease and gluten related digestive symptoms – even the *thought* of holiday meals can be anxiety provoking. Gluten is the protein in many cereal grains (wheat, rye, barley, spelt, kamut or triticale and foods that contain them) and can cause unpleasant side effects for those who are gluten sensitive.

“If you live gluten-free—whether you have been diagnosed with celiac disease or gluten intolerance or are one of many who feel better avoiding gluten--you don’t want to feel different or left out of holiday celebrations,” says Dr. Barry Kaufman, director of the Celiac Diagnostic Center at Atlantic Gastroenterology Associates on Fire Road here.

“There are more options than ever when it comes to gluten-free holiday recipes and store-bought items that will allow you to have your cake and eat it, too, Kaufman says. There is even a wide selection of gluten free beers.”

While Christmas cookies are everywhere this time of year and potato latkes adorn every Chanukah table, you can enjoy these dishes – even if you have celiac. Consider making Northfield’s Christine’s Italian Pastry Shoppe’s [gluten-free Eggnog Cookies\\*](#); swap out potato starch for flour in [latkes\\*](#) (potato pancakes) with a recipe by South Jersey food writer Deb Rosman, or, the traditional [doughnut holes](#) or [sufganiyot\\*](#) (jelly doughnuts). The usual holiday table suspects can all be made gluten-free. Health food stores, bakeries and major food chains have aisles devoted to gluten free foods.

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If you have been living with Celiac disease, you are likely already quite adept at bringing creativity into the kitchen. Consider making small differences that can add a little fa-la-la to ho-hum recipes. For example, instead of mashed potatoes, make a gluten free sweet potato pie. Forget stuffing in favor wild rice with cranberries. Add new flavors to your holiday table that will make people forget they aren't having crunchy-topped casseroles.

Dr. Kaufman and his team at the Celiac Diagnostic Center offer a few tips for those who are getting ready for holiday celebrations.

1. **Get involved in the planning!** Whether at work, a relative's or a friend's party, your offer to help will likely be greatly appreciated. Volunteer to help plan, do the shopping or prepare some of the goodies. In doing that you can make sure there are enough gluten-free options.
2. **Offer to be the host!** This will take a bit of pre-planning but you can enjoy the gathering knowing there isn't anything you can't eat!
3. **Take care of yourself!** Have a snack before you go so you aren't starving when you arrive at the party. And, keep a favorite snack in the car for the ride home. That way, if you weren't able to find enough to eat, you will have something to look forward to later.

"It's easy to get carried away at holiday time," Dr. Kaufman said. "I'd advise against it. As the old saying goes, 'when in doubt, leave it out.' If there are any questionable ingredients, don't risk it. Feeling sick is no way to spend a holiday."

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The Celiac Diagnostic Center is dedicated to the diagnosis of celiac disease and gluten related disorders. It offers compassionate consideration of your symptoms and will determine if you have celiac disease using state-of-the-art diagnostic testing, particularly if you are uncertain of the veracity of prior diagnostic testing that may have been done by other physicians. For more information on celiac visit [atlanticgastro.com](http://atlanticgastro.com).

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