# Enjoying Thanksgiving With Anxiety

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## Top Tips for Thanksgiving With Anxiety

Thanksgiving kicks off the holiday season, so it's a particularly anxious time for a lot of people. Whether or not you're on the best terms with the whole family, all sorts of stresses and worries can creep up in the days leading up to the big gathering, and when you suffer from an anxiety disorder, those thoughts can be overwhelming.

Although you may be dreading the day, don't downplay your ability to overcome any challenges that get in your way. With a bit of preparation and some clever coping skills to use in conversation, you're bound to worry less and enjoy yourself more.

### Prepare for Success

A bit of forethought can result in a lot of stress relief. Take a moment to calculate your plan for the day, addressing your physical comfort as well as any external factors that could cause trouble:

- **Have a game plan for problem people –** If you know you can expect a certain person to get on your case, think about how you'll deal with them. It's important to stand up for yourself, but that can be easier said than done. If you can't muster the courage at the time, prepare to leave the room, or sandwich yourself between loving and compassionate family members for support.
- **Bring medication –** It's a last resort, but fast acting anxiety medication can get you through particularly difficult moments. Talk to your doctor about how and when to take it, and what to avoid while taking it.
- **Rest before –** Relaxation is a big part of beating anxiety, so take some time to unwind before the gathering. If you're hosting, get an early start on the preparations, so you have enough time to take a calming bath, relaxing stretch, or short meditation before company arrives.

### Tips to Stay in Control

When you get overwhelmed by your surroundings, you begin to lose control. When you lose control, your anxiety can spike quickly and drastically, even if there's no immediate threat. The key to a safe, happy and healthy Thanksgiving is to stay on top of your own physical and emotional well being, and that means you need to act tactfully:

- **Arrive early –** When you're one of the first people to arrive, you give yourself some breathing space. You can ease into the atmosphere, settle into light conversation, and avoid a barrage of attention. In effect, when you are the first one at the event, you are in control of the meetings and greetings, rather than falling prey to excited and nosy friends and relatives.
- **Share carefully –** If there have been some recent changes in your life, you may want to keep them to yourself, for now. Offering up big news (whether it's good or bad) can bring on a flurry of questions, comments, concerns and contentions. Handling the action and social obligations of Thanksgiving itself is enough for one day. Save the news for another occasion, or even better, leak it to a close family member

and they can spread it around for you!

- **Avoid food triggers –** Caffeine, alcohol, and sugar can quickly lead to an anxious episode, but you may have some other personal triggers, too. Get to know what sorts of things may bring on physical or emotional stress, and err on the safe side when it's time for the feast. On the other hand, there may be some food and drink that you find calming and comforting: herbal tea and warm milk are commonly used to relax, but everybody's different. Sipping water continually may provide enough rhythm and distraction to center yourself.

**Relax and Recharge**

If you feel yourself getting anxious, take a deep breath and fall back on trusted relaxation techniques. Cognitive behavioural therapy, visualization, progressive relaxation, or simply listening to some comforting music are good ways to calm your mind and help you get through the hustle and bustle of the gathering. It's important to take some time to relax before the party, but don't be afraid to step away during the event to get a breath of fresh air and a moment of peace.

If you're hosting Thanksgiving, take it easy on yourself, and delegate. Don't bother making excuses, just be polite, but confident, when you ask reliable friends or relatives to chip in with the preparations, the food or the clean-up. A confident demeanor can eliminate a lot of the tense indecision, and will keep you in control.