

A GUIDE TO CELEBRATIONS WITHOUT FOOD

We have all heard it before, F-O-O-D does not have to spell F-U-N, but the sometimes daunting task of planning a birthday party or holiday celebration without the emphasis on food can be tricky for both the young and the young at heart. The best advice is to think outside the box. What you once thought of as typical birthday and holiday necessities can oftentimes be replaced by crafts, games and new traditions.

Parties

Parties, which many view as an enjoyable event, can strike fear in the parents of children who cannot eat or who are on very restricted diets. Adults are no exception. We all try hard to 'fit in', and sometimes this simply is not possible where food is concerned. It is important to remember that both children and adults will generally be able to handle activities where forbidden foods are offered if you **keep their stomachs full**.

- ❖ Arrive at the party filled with plenty of formula and safe foods so that the temptation to cheat or feel left out is less.
- ❖ **Advance Planning** can help eliminate some of the stress of these functions.
- ❖ **Communicate** health needs to friends and family so that they are prepared not to eat with you.

As they say, **timing is everything**. Try to plan parties and celebrations outside typical meal times when the lack of food won't be so noticeable to your guests. How about a birthday party at 10 am or 2 pm? Invite the family over after Thanksgiving dinner has been served at another person's house for games and conversation. When attending the party of a friend or family member, be sure to ask what foods will be served and what activities are planned. Try to suggest timing the celebration so that you join the party for the fun and activities and leave before the food arrives. Different children and adults have different tolerance levels for being around food and food activities. It's best to make decisions about events to attend and events to skip based on your - or your child's - acceptance for being different. Some children will be ok having a plain rice cake or a cup of formula while everyone else is having birthday cake. For others, sitting around watching everyone else eat is far too painful, and it would be better not to attend.

For children on limited diets, sometimes it's possible to include your child's food restrictions in the festivities. Your child can only tolerate water- then eat sno-cones. Make sno-cones for the whole group, some kids can add sugar syrup made with safe Kool-Aid, and others can eat it with formula or simply plain. Rice cakes are the only thing on the menu? How about decorating rice cakes with tubes of icing? Sometimes, even a child that can not eat the icing will enjoy decorating and will not feel so left out while they munch their plain rice cake beside their friend's decorated one. If sugar is tolerated, you can mold cotton candy into cake pans to look like typical cakes.

Big dinners, picnics and all-out feasts got you down? Buck tradition! Plan a family football or volleyball game instead of the holiday feast. Everyone, young and old alike, can participate in fun games such as sack races or water balloon tosses. Scavenger hunts are

always fun with a big group—get the kids out and about and offer small toys to the group that finishes first. Or hold your holiday event at a park which offers swimming, boat rentals, a concert or rides instead.

Birthdays

- ❖ Try to plan parties and celebrations **outside of typical meal times** when the lack of food won't be so noticeable to your guests. How about a birthday party at 10 am or 2 pm?
- ❖ Whoever said a birthday cake has to be cake? Have children make their own 'cake' out of Play-Doh. Cardboard 'gingerbread' houses can be decorated with all sorts of small treasures: glitter, buttons, yarn, scraps of paper and stickers. Snowmen can be molded out of shaved ice. You can hunt for buried treasures in plastic boxes filled with sand.
- ❖ Host a theme party and forget the 'cake' altogether—go ice-skating, bowling, rent an inflatable house or go to the movies instead.

School parties

- ❖ Rule number one is **Get Involved**. It is much easier to work out an alternative to food for a school party prior to the event than it is to deal with the tears when your child was overlooked and her needs forgotten.
- ❖ Suggest some games—kids that are busy may not ever notice that no food was served.
- ❖ Host a theme party: a luau, dance party or camp-out. Piñatas can be filled with an assortment of small toys and inexpensive trinkets, which will be played with long after the candy is gone.

Classroom Rewards

- ❖ Discuss the situation at the beginning of the year.
- ❖ Suggest non-food rewards, such as special pencils with the school name or colors, a special dress day, a "Get Out of Homework Today" coupon or extra recess. Candy treats do not have to accompany compliments on good behavior—bring in a treasure chest filled with safe treats and small toys—the Oriental Trading Co www.orientaltrading.com has a large selection at reasonable prices.
- ❖ Try a reinforcement system of random "Positive Phone Calls", where every week one student's parents are called with a positive report from the teacher.
- ❖ Draw attention to the desired behavior, not the treat that accompanies the praise.

Holidays

New Year's Eve

Fill champagne flutes with sparkling water, offer dancing, board games and sparklers to ring in the New Year.

Valentine's Day

No sweets from your sweetie this year? How about a romantic night away at a local hotel or a gift certificate for a massage or spa treatment for both of you? Kids can make Valentines for classmates with craft supplies and skip the candy, or supply a safe candy for the class. Heart themed games and craft ideas can be found at www.familyfun.com

Passover

Although the focus of Passover is typically a meal, providing other activities for non-eating children can make the holiday more enjoyable. Hide coins for the children to find. Make a special cup for the celebration. Passover beading projects and other suggestions can be found at www.chadiscrafts.com/fun/passover.html

Easter

Regardless of what some people think, Easter really isn't about candy. Decorate plastic or rubber eggs with paints, stickers and glitter. The Easter Bunny can hide small toys or coins inside of plastic eggs for hunting. Easter baskets can be filled with books, legos, art supplies or washable stuffed animals. Instead of a big Easter dinner, how about a family bike ride or walk to a local park, or spend time studying the spiritual significance of Easter.

Memorial Day and 4th of July

These holidays generally have people dreaming of backyard BBQ's and picnics. Why not spend the day swimming or boating at a park or lake? How about a camping trip? Renting a commercial sno cone or shaved ice machine from a party supply store generally isn't expensive and can provide lots of cool fun on a warm summer day. Fireworks and sno cones can go a long way in making the day a festive one.

Halloween

Trick or Treating doesn't have to scare you this year. Many families report that they let their child gather candy and then swap it out for safe treats, a larger toy or money once they get back home. Consider trick-or-treating for charity instead of candy. There are also churches and community centers that are planning Halloween or Fall Festival parties that don't include food. Small toys, treats and crafts can be found inexpensively at www.orientaltrading.com

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is about giving thanks for what we have and for the people we have in our lives. Spend your time with family and friends who understand that food isn't the focus of this special day or join the party after the food has been served and cleaned up. How about spending the afternoon having everyone share what they are thankful for? Have the children perform a Thanksgiving play for the family or work on crafts.

Chanukah

Chanukah crafts are an excellent alternative to food. Children can make Dreidels to play with, make or decorate a Menorah, or look for coins.

Christmas

When we think of Christmas, we are often reminded of the foods associated with the season. How about returning to the spirit of the holiday? Attend the spiritual service of your choice,

take in a holiday concert, or go door to door singing Christmas carols for your neighbors. Experience the Christmas spirit by giving your time and talents as a family by volunteering at a food bank, organizing a toy drive, visiting a nursing home or adopting a family.

In general it's time to revise what you once thought a holiday needs in order to celebrate and have fun. So when the invitations roll in, get creative and leave the fear at home! Chances are, if you plan things right, **F-U-N** turns out to be much more fun than **F-O-O-D**.

Guide for students with chronic illness

<http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/public/lung/asthma/guidfam.pdf>