Enjoying Thanksgiving With Overactive Bladder

by ANGELA FINLAY

Strategies for a Comfortable Meal

Overactive bladder can be difficult to control, and as a result, many people with this condition dread big social events. The endless food, big crowds and unfamiliar facilities can keep your thoughts firmly tied to leaks and escape routes rather than fun and festivities. Fortunately, the right preparation, conscious eating and some clever choices can get you through Thanksgiving festivities without an embarrassing episode.

Getting Through the Meal in Comfort

Eating and drinking are the main events at a Thanksgiving gathering, but these can also be your biggest hurdles. Lots of foods and beverages can trigger OAB symptoms, but not every sufferer has the same sensitivities. Do yourself a favor, and get to know which habits or ingredients stress your bladder, and how to avoid them without drawing too much attention to yourself:

- **Eat small, wholesome meals throughout the day:** You may decide to avoid food to avoid OAB triggers, but that's not such a good idea. First, an empty stomach can lead you to overindulge at the first opportunity, and second, it can mess with your digestive regularity. Constipation can put pressure on your bladder, which is sure to make your OAB a whole lot worse. Try to sidestep the problem by getting some fiber early in the day, and sipping on water throughout.
- **Be careful with the bubbly –** Festive occasions can call for champagne, but that's a dangerous indulgence for OAB sufferers. After all, alcohol is a diuretic (which means it makes you urinate more often), and carbonated beverages can irritate the bladder even more. If you want to join the beverage fun, a small glass of white or red wine and sip on it slowly to help limit your bladder response.
- **Stay hydrated –** Yes, that's right — overactive bladder and dehydration do not mix. It may seem counterintuitive, but staying hydrated will help your OAB.
- **Go easy on coffee and dessert:** The caffeine in coffee, tea and chocolate is another known trigger for overactive bladder, so be extra careful around the dessert table. Herbal tea is a good alternative, and you may want to stick with a cookie or two for a post-feast treat. Remember that citric acid is also a bladder irritant, and while a lemon slice in your water might be fine, pass on more citrus-heavy sweets.
- **Stick to your guns, but be polite:** OAB can be a pretty embarrassing condition, and sometimes what you choose to eat and drink can draw unwanted attention. If people insist that your plate isn't nearly full enough, or begin to question your motive for abstaining from alcohol, offer a nice, short answer.

Rather than make a string of excuses to defend your behavior, simply state that you're happy with what you've taken, and try to steer the conversation in another direction. It can be frustrating to deal with people who try to single you out, but in many cases, they're only reacting to their own failing willpower at the buffet. When you speak confidently and play up your devotion to good health, those around you are more likely to respectfully stop their prying.

How to Dress to Impress with OAB

What you choose to wear on Thanksgiving can mean the difference between a happy day of catching up and an afternoon of worry and distraction. Clothing can't relieve your symptoms, but the right outfit can help you feel better, and allow you to blend in seamlessly.

- **Wear dark colors:** If you do experience a bit of leakage, a pair of dark trousers or a dark skirt can hide the evidence much more easily than lighter or brighter colors. The bonus? Navy blue, charcoal gray and black have a classic elegance that will fit the occasion perfectly.
- **Choose A line over fitted bottoms:** It's a good idea to protect against leaks by wearing a pad or incontinence briefs, especially when you're away from the comfort of your own home and bathroom. Protective undergarments are invisible under fabric that drapes easily over the hips and legs, so you can feel more confident in a flowing dress than you would in a pencil skirt.

Incontinence medications (anticholinergics) can be particularly helpful when you have a big event to attend since they get to the root of the problem by limiting bladder contractions. However, these drugs need a few days to take effect, so begin taking them at the start of the week to have better protection on the day of your Thanksgiving gathering.