

## **Navigating social situations**

Celebrations present many opportunities for friends, families and co-workers to gather around a food theme. The goal for most vegans eating in social situations is for everyone to view their food habits as “normal,” and for the vegan to not feel “conspicuous.” Here are some ideas:

1. Ask those who will be with you to please support your decision. If you feel there will be food bullying, ask supporters in advance to speak to others and ask people to refrain from commenting on food choices.
2. If it is a party, some prefer to eat in advance so they can focus on conversation and not on food.
3. If going to a home or a pot luck, bring a dish that can be your entrée if your other options might be raw fruit and veggies.

### **Restaurants**

4. See if you can influence the choice. Choosing a restaurant not overtly flesh focused will be easier mentally-avoid BBQ, “seafood”, fried chickens etc. Ask for international if you like that type of food-Indian, Thai, Ethiopian, Chinese, Mexican, Mediterranean, all have items if not vegan, easily can be.
5. Look at the menu online and identify some possible choices.
6. Call restaurants in advance and see if your selections are or can be made vegan.
7. When ordering, assume no one knows what vegan really means. So instead of saying no dairy on your burrito, say “no cheese, no sour cream”. For Thai, specify “no fish sauce”.
8. If you will be in a group where you do not want others to be slowed or hear your special order, after confirming on the phone your item can be made as requested, you can write it down and hand it to the server when you arrive or when asked for your order.

### **Home Settings**

9. Ask the host to place large platters of animals (turkey, ham, etc) in the kitchen and let people get their portions from there and not on the table so you do not have to sit at the table and have to see the animal if you find it upsetting.
10. If it is important to you to have a meat substitute, bring a Gardein Turk’y Roast or Tofurkey and heat and eat it so you have something in the “center of your plate” like others. If it is not important to you, just fill your plate with delicious vegan side dishes!
11. If you suspect you will be met with hostility and unwillingness to accommodate even modifications to side dishes, just make a plate of food at home for you or bring your meal components ready to heat and be 100% self-reliant and control your own food destiny.

### **Work or pot luck style settings**

12. Ask the host/organizer to encourage participants to bring the dish ingredients on a piece of paper that can be placed by the dish. That way attendees with allergies, medication interaction concerns or people who for health or ethical reasons do not want to eat certain products can more confidently join in. By making a broad request, you do not draw attention to the fact that you are vegan and show that there are many people who want to know what is in food before considering it for their plate.

13. If the gathering is family, consider asking the host to make the majority of side dishes vegan with simple substitutions like vegan margarine, plant based milk, and omitting meat, egg and cheese from dishes like salads and cooked vegetables.

14. Unsure what to bring? Here are some easy, “accidentally vegan” ideas!

Pasta and marinara sauce; Vegetable fried rice, canned vegetarian baked beans that happen to be vegan, roasted vegetables, French or sourdough bread or rolls that happen to be vegan with vegan margarine or make garlic toast. Macaroni or potato salad made with vegan mayo.

While it is generally easy to know if a question about veganism is curiosity (people wondering if they could eat less animals etc) or bullying to mask their guilt about contributing to harm, most of us do not want entire groups focused on the topic. Do not assume malice. Maybe the person is just blunt or does not have a good command of the English language or is not sophisticated/modern enough to understand that use of a particular term or “teasing” is hurtful.

Create a quick response in advance to provide if asked about your food choices. Something like “I’m happy to discuss my life choices one on one later, but we are here to celebrate \_\_\_ and I’d rather focus on that now.” Then you or someone else can transition the conversation to another topic.

Gatherings can be fun, and vegan or not, people worry about the food they bring or social interactions, so focus on the goal of the event (family, work bonding) and remember other people have struggles, too, we can all work to be kind at social gatherings.