

NPR Morning Edition, Thanksgiving Day

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Commentary: Making It Through Thanksgiving On a Low-Carb Diet

The ultimate fantasy Thanksgiving is more like a nightmare for those struggling with a low-carbohydrate diet. On Morning Edition, Renee Schettler, assistant food editor for The Washington Post, offers advice on how to make it through the holiday with your low-carb goals intact.

BOB EDWARDS, host: Well, if it were only that easy. And if you could only eat like that every day without having to fret about the fat or the protein or, for that matter, the carbohydrates. Washington Post assistant food editor Renee Schettler says do not despair.

MS. RENEE SCHE'TTLER: Atkins, South Beach, Fat Flush, the Zone. The low-carb craze is everywhere, and it's coming to Thanksgiving dinner. Today, while some at the table are saying grace, others will be counting carbohydrates. For the carb-conscious, the typical Thanksgiving meal is a minefield: gravy thickened with refined flour, stuffing loaded with processed white bread, cranberries buried beneath simple sugar. For those counting, that's somewhere around a whopping 200 grams of carbs, more than twice as many as most plans allow in an entire day. There's no way a nibble or two of mashed potatoes or a few bites of pie will sabotage your diet. But that third helping of just about everything might yank your happily humming metabolism out of its carb-deprived fat-burning state and plunk it right back at its supersluggish rate.

It's not as though the traditional meal couldn't stand a dose of temperance. But in an attempt to be poundwise, many dieters have become carb foolish. Atkins newsletters and online recipe swaps propose cockamamie recipes—mashed potatoes made from cauliflower? stuffing made from crushed pork rinds?—just like the vegetarian who serves tofu shaped like turkey. And that's nothing to be thankful for.

Why not concentrate on what you can have? Like herb-infused turkey drippings. Grapes doused with balsamic vinegar and olive oil. Wild mushrooms roasted with herbs. Leafy greens sauted in nutty brown butter. Balsamic-glazed pears with rosemary. From first to last course, a feast like this contains fewer carbs than a single slice of pumpkin pie. It's far from abstemious and allows plenty of room for those crucial discretionary carbs. You can have some of Mom's mashed potatoes or Aunt Gertrude's cornbread dressing—just not both.

Sure, there's a lot more to give thanks for than being able to fit into your skinny jeans. But somehow, fitting into them makes it an awful lot easier to give thanks for everything else.

EDWARDS: The comments of Renee Schettler, assistant food editor for The Washington Post.