

Not home for the holidays



Be on your best behavior when you are a guest at someone else's home for a holiday meal

At a recent dining tutorial for student athletes, I learned many college athletes don't get home for the holidays, because of competitions and obligations. A wrestler invited to a Thanksgiving dinner, asked for pointers for eating at someone else's home. Whether you are the guest of friends, family or a business colleague, here they are:

1. **Be on time.** If you arrive late, don't expect special preparation of leftovers for you. Holiday meals are hard enough the first time around.
2. **Follow your host's lead.** Wait until your host tells you where to sit. Wait for the host to put the napkin in his/her lap. Wait for the host to begin eating.
3. **Know some table manner basics.** Bread plate on your left, drinks on your right. Start with the utensils on the outside and work your way in to the plate. Dessert utensils are above. Pass items counterclockwise from your left to your right, the handle of the serving utensils pointed to the next person.
4. **Be generous with your compliments and sparing with your portions.** Don't ask for seconds -- wait until they are offered. Taste your food before seasoning and don't over season -- it's an insult to the cook.
5. **Don't let them know if you don't like something.** You don't have to eat anything you don't like. Say, "No thank you," or cut it up and move it around the plate. Try not to let people know you don't like their food. It's like telling them their baby is ugly.
6. **What topics you should avoid.** It's okay to talk religion and politics, as long as you are respectful. Just don't grouse about your health problems, your diet (I can't eat that -- too many calories!) or boast about workouts. No one wants to feel guilty about enjoying a feast.
7. **Offer to help clean up, do dishes or take the trash out.** But don't force your services on your hosts. Don't start shoving dishes in the dishwasher -- everyone has a particular way of packing their dishwasher and certain items they want kept out of the dishwasher.
8. **Bring a hostess gift.** It doesn't have to be expensive - a box of chocolates, mixed nuts, notecards, a music CD or something for the hosts' interests or hobbies. (The aforementioned wrestler was bringing sports tickets to his sports loving hosts. Score!) If you bring a bottle of wine that your hosts don't open, leave it.
9. **Know when to leave.** Don't overstay your welcome. When your hosts are tired out and everyone is leaving, that is your cue to leave, too.
10. **Follow up with a thank you note.** Send a hand-written fold-over thank you note to your hosts or to any person who has treated you to a meal. An email alone won't do. Thank your hosts for their hospitality, great food and conversation.

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