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Chapters

turning the pages through grief



Grief and Food:

10 reasons why your Thanksgiving spread might make you cry

Courtesy
What's Your Grief
whatsyourgrief.com

Grief doesn't always turn you into an unpredictable ball of emotion, but sometimes it does. Sometimes things like a song, a word, a familiar face, a commercial, a cheesy quote, a shoe without a match, a wilted flower, or a friendly-looking stranger waiting at a bus stop can bring you to tears.

Think about it, before your loved one died, would you have ever thought it possible that green bean casserole could make you sad? Of course not! It's green bean casserole, and it's delicious! The only time anyone should feel sad about green bean casserole is when it's gone.

After someone dies, you suddenly see reminders of their memory and absence everywhere. A random display at Target leaves you in tears, the season changes, and it hits you like a ton of bricks, a song comes on the radio, and you have to pull your car over because you can't see through your tears. The reminders are everywhere, and your holiday meals are no exception. Please allow me to illustrate with ten reasons why grief and food might make you feel difficult feelings this Thanksgiving.

- 1) Your loved one's staple dish (also your favorite) is missing for the first time in years.
- 2) You try to recreate your loved one's recipe and it's a total fail.
- 3) In a horrible mashup of emotion, anxiety, and stress you impulsively eat everything in sight and end up with a stomach ache.
- 4) You drew the short straw and reluctantly got stuck making the Thanksgiving meal.
- 5) Your Aunt Millie graciously offers to step in and make the meal, but sadly Aunt Millie is a terrible cook.
- 6) You decide to skip the meal altogether but feel a tinge of sadness about what you *think* you might be missing.
- 7) You had the meal catered because you couldn't face cooking and everything just seems a little lackluster.

continued...

**NOVEMBER
2025**

Appreciation can make a day, even change a life.
Your willingness to put it into words is all that is necessary.
—Margaret Cousins

...continued from front

8) The food looks amazing but you have no appetite.

9) Negative coping in full swing, you spend the whole day in avoidance mode.

10) Everything looks amazing and the food is delicious. You made your loved one's famous stuffing and it came out perfectly. Except, without them there, you are acutely aware that things will never be the same.

Although the fact that Thanksgiving will never be the same is as clear as the food on your table, this doesn't mean the holiday will never be happy again. Keep yourself open to every emotion this holiday season, including joy.



Where does Thanksgiving meet you this year?

Yes, let's imagine that Thanksgiving is meeting you. Adjusting its tone to meet yours, and not the other way around. And why shouldn't it be that way? Sometimes, it feels like the holidays ask us to be inauthentic. Even if we are struggling and sad on a day-to-day basis, when the holiday rolls around, we think we have to perk up, put on a pair of dress pants, make a casserole, and pretend we feel a way that we do not.

However, I find it helpful to label where these pressures actually come from. Usually, when you step back and examine them, you see they are not fundamental to any holiday. Instead, they often come from a place of obligation, guilt, and societal expectation.

Thanksgiving asks a few things of us, none of which insist you must be happy or even mostly grateful. The day asks us to take some time to celebrate, honor, remember, give thanks, savor, and appreciate. How you do this can be up to you, and at no point should it require you to put your grief away.

And when has Thanksgiving ever been perfect, anyway?

In my experience, it's always a mixed bag. The positives, which may include a day off work, togetherness, good food, and gratitude, are balanced out by burnt recipes, long travel days, dinner table disagreements, and years when things like strained relationships, grief, or physical illness loom large. Some years, the good outweighs the bad; other years, it doesn't. If this is a "doesn't" year, remember that's normal and okay.

The holidays are not only for happy people, just as moments of gratitude and appreciation are not only for people who feel satisfied and content with their lives.

These things are for everyone. You don't need to mold yourself into someone you're not to celebrate Thanksgiving; instead, bring yourself and your grieving heart to the day as they are. There is room for everyone at the table.



The Lessons of Grief

Readers share in their own words

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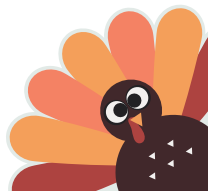
My dad worked for farm manufacturing company, and I grew up with him smelling of Brylcreme and soybean flour. After he passed away, whenever I would be near the place where he worked the smell of soybeans would hit me and, I'd get withdrawn and blue but I didn't put it together. Once it dawned on me when and where it was happening things changed for me. I have a sweater of his that still has the slight smell of Brylcreme on the collar. It's like getting a hug from my dad.

—Dave P.

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DID YOU KNOW?



■ **Green Bean Casserole:** The classic Thanksgiving side dish was created by a Campbell's Soup employee named Dorcas Reilly.

■ **Turkey Trivia:** The largest turkey on record weighed 86 pounds. Only male turkeys, called toms, make the gobble sound.

■ **Thanksgiving Calories:** A typical Thanksgiving dinner can contain between 3,000 and 4,500 calories.

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