

What Happens When You Eat Too Much at Thanksgiving

How Much You're *Really* Eating

Any idea how many calories the typical American consumes on Thanksgiving Day? Hold on to your hats—or, rather, loosen your belts: 4,500, and a whopping 229 grams of fat, says the [Calorie Control Council](#). That breaks down to 3,000 for the dinner and another 1,500 for snacks and nibbling (looking at you, French onion dip). “Combined, that's the equivalent of more than 2 1/4 times the average daily calorie intake and almost 3 1/2 times the fat—with 45 percent of calories from fat,” according to the council’s website.

The Science Of Getting Stuffed

So how does the body handle that turkey/stuffing/pie assault? Your stomach is strategizing before you even take your first bite, says Robynne Chutkan, a gastroenterologist and the author of *The Microbiome Solution*. At the sight of food, saliva secretes in the mouth to break down bites before they inch down the esophagus. And those stretchy pants will come in handy as the belly starts to fill to its capacity of about a liter (some eaters can max out at up to four).

As food fills the stomach, hydrochloric acid is released to aid digestion. But when there's too much food, the acid gets pushed up the esophagus—hello, heartburn! Once the belly swells to capacity, it begins to press on other organs, which also feel the squeeze. If you've scarfed your meal or washed it down with a fizzy drink, you've swallowed air, making you even more bloated. That's why a hearty burp (excuse you) relieves pressure.

And that moment when you just can't take another bite? It's not necessarily evidence of reasonable thinking, says Chutkan. It could simply be that leptin, a satiety hormone, has signaled the brain to call it quits. Fatty foods (pass the potatoes au gratin) make the message more urgent.

How To Counteract Bloating

Don't skip breakfast and lunch in anticipation of a big meal, says Chutkan. By the time dinner rolls around, your hunger hormone, ghrelin will be urging you to eat and you may do so past your set point.

After feasting, you may feel sluggish, but don't sink into the sofa. "Lying down inhibits digestion," says Chutkan. Instead, hit up those Black Friday sales or take a short walk around the block to aid digestion and help with discomfort.

And don't worry; you won't derail your diet from just one extravagant meal. To feel better the next day, Chutkan recommends opting for smoothies and soups. "It's like plumbing when the pipes are clogged. Lighten things up with liquids to help move things through."

The Skinny On Favorite Thanksgiving Foods

Roasted Turkey, no skin, 4 slices: 190 calories, 6 grams of fat

Baked ham, 3 slices: 345 calories, 21 grams of fat

Bread stuffing, 1 cup: 355 calories, 17 grams of fat

Green bean casserole, 1 cup: 143 calories, 8 grams of fat

Cranberry sauce, 1/2 cup: 209 calories, 0 grams of fat

Pumpkin pie, 1/8 of 9" pie: 323 calories, 15 grams of fat

Eggnog with whole milk and alcohol, 1 cup: 439 calories, 19 grams of fat

Pecan pie, 1/8 of 9" pie: 456 calories, 21 grams of fat

— *From the Calorie Control Council*