

Does turkey actually make you sleepy?

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It's as reliable as the parades and football matches: Come Thanksgiving, you indulge in your family's traditional feast before settling in for a much-needed nap. But while many may blame the day's "food coma" on the turkey specifically, it's more likely a result of overeating.

That's not to say that turkey can't make you sleepy.

"Turkey, which is typically the star of a Thanksgiving meal, is naturally high in tryptophan," Uma Naidoo, a nutritional psychiatrist and the author of "This is Your Brain on Food," told Health.

What is tryptophan?

According to WebMD, tryptophan is an "[essential amino acid](#) that plays a role in the production of serotonin, melatonin, niacin, and nicotinamide."

And while tryptophan—and the melatonin it produces—can make us sleepy, it's also helpful in breaking down food, growing and repairing tissues, producing hormones and brain chemicals, and maintaining a healthy digestive system.

But laying the blame on turkey is a bit simplistic. After all, tryptophan is also found in plenty of foods we eat all year long, including cheese, chicken, [egg whites](#), fish, milk, peanuts and pumpkin and [sesame seeds](#).

Avoid overeating

Knowing how widespread [tryptophan](#) is, it makes sense to look for other causes of your post-meal sleepiness. The main factor is actually overeating, especially of the high-carb side dishes that so many of us love—mashed potatoes, mac & cheese, bread. Experts also note that a few cocktails or beers over the course of the afternoon can leave you feeling tired too.

"To avoid post-meal drowsiness, it is important to not eat past your body's fullness," explained Georgia-based nutritionist Trista Best, RD,

LD. "Don't stuff yourself at the meal to the point of being uncomfortable. It is also important to make sure you are hydrated as this will help with energy as well."

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