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Holidays: A recipe for heartburn?

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Practice portion control to help avoid heartburn on food-focused holidays like Thanksgiving.

***** Scroll down to watch a video about minimally-invasive acid-reflux surgery at the Nebraska Medical Center. *****

Heavy meals on days like Thanksgiving take a toll on more than your figure. They can affect your esophagus, too.

Gastroesophageal reflux disease and its most common symptom, heartburn, affect roughly 30 million Americans, according to the [American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy](#). Food-focused holidays can be particularly damaging.

"The reason the holidays in general are tough on heartburn is we eat late, eat a lot and many of us have a lot of alcohol," said Dr. Dmitry Oleynikov, a gastrointestinal surgeon at the Nebraska Medical Center. "All those predispose us to heartburn."

Heartburn occurs when acidic digestive juices outnumber the enzymes that are meant to neutralize it. Obesity, alcohol, chocolate, coffee, citrus fruits and tomato-based products can contribute to acid reflux.

Avoid trigger foods, eat earlier in the day and dish out smaller portions, Oleynikov suggests.

"Quantity is something you have to watch out for," he said. "If you have a very large meal, it sits in the stomach awhile before it can be parceled out. While it sits in the stomach, it can back up."

For those who already experience frequent heartburn, it's especially important to watch what you eat and how much.

Tums and milk help counteract infrequent flare-ups, but severe and persistent burning requires medication, said Dr. Tommy Lee, an acid reflux expert at Creighton University Medical Center.

"If you're one of those people who uses medication on a regular basis and are just barely getting by, you have to wonder if acid reflux may cause more problems down the road or even now," he said.

Consult a physician if your heartburn symptoms worsen or you have difficult swallowing.