



THREE ER DOCTORS ON THE MANY, MANY WAYS THANKSGIVING WILL PUT YOU IN THE HOSPITAL

How a mellow day of gluttony and football turns into a hellscape of carnage
Thanksgiving is a time of gratitude, and also of eating so much your stomach ruptures shortly after getting into a fistfight with your in-laws. We talked to three ER doctors who describe how Thanksgiving is also a day of burned flesh, bloodletting and broken bones — fortunately, they also shared tips on how to stay out of the hospital. Happy Thanksgiving!

DR. DARRIA LONG GILLESPIE, NORTHSIDE HOSPITAL, ATLANTA

I see people who had a turkey they wanted to deep fry, but it was still frozen. Everybody's seen the video where the fire department shows what happens when you drop a frozen turkey in a deep fryer and it explodes — even if it's slightly frozen, that can be enough to cause a problem. Or rather, it causes an

explosion and grease burns. If you want to deep fry a turkey, go for it, but be careful — it's extremely hot, and it's not the safest way to cook turkey. A lot of times, Thanksgiving is the first time the family will have gotten together in the last 10 months, so there's that added stress of putting all that together. A lot of times it's right after an election, so there's that, too. One woman I remember came in having a full-on panic attack — I remember she'd been trying to host her entire extended family with lots of melodrama, and she came in having chest pain and her heart was racing. She ended up just having a really bad panic attack because of all the stress. That isn't unusual.

The *New York Times* said that the average American consumes 4,500 calories and 200 grams of fat on Thanksgiving. It's a lot more work for your body to digest that amount, so your heart has to pump blood to your intestines, and that increases the demand for oxygen, which is why we have the food coma. It has nothing to do with **tryptophan** — that makes you sleepy, but it's nothing in comparison to the pounds of casserole that you ate. If somebody has high blood pressure or diabetes, studies have shown they're four to seven times more likely to suffer a heart attack in the two hours after eating a big meal.

One guy I took care of got a big chunk of turkey stuck in his esophagus. We gave him many medications, and you have to have a gastroenterologist remove it with endoscopy. It often happens with red meat, too. You always feel sorry for the person — they come in, and they literally can't even swallow their saliva because it's all backed up in their esophagus.

Then there are the cuts: People have been drinking, their guests leave and they decide it's a great time to wash all their wine glasses and their knives. I took care of one woman who was holding the sponge and sticking her hand into the wine glass. The shard cut her hand and actually cut through a nerve and an artery. So sharp objects plus alcohol: Not a good idea!

I haven't seen anybody having a physical fight over a political or family argument, but there are the weekend warriors who play in an annual family Thanksgiving football game. I've had people come in with torn knee ligaments or a fracture. One guy tore his ACL. We see a lot of those.

Similarly, I've seen lots of injuries from thawing turkeys — there was one guy who didn't realize his turkey was frozen and dropped it on his toe, breaking it. You see people doing crazy things to thaw their turkey — leaving it outside, leaving it in water, all of which are going to set them up for getting sick the next day. That's when Thanksgiving becomes the gift that keeps on giving.

DR. LISA DABBY, UCLA MEDICAL CENTER, SANTA MONICA

I really enjoy working Thanksgiving in the ER. The day usually starts out quieter than usual, but then we get the slow trickle of patients who injure themselves preparing Thanksgiving dinner. It definitely picks up as the day progresses — we get a lot of lacerations, whether cutting themselves while cutting the turkey, cutting themselves with the immersion blender while preparing soup or just cutting their finger while chopping vegetables. And without fail, there's always a wine glass injury!

I notice that we get a larger homeless and psychiatric clientele during the holidays. I think some are looking for some company and food, more so than on other days.

That said, I find that most people don't come to the ER unless it's a real emergency — for the most part, patients try to hold out and enjoy the holiday, which always makes the day *after* a holiday super busy.

DR. SUDIP BOSE, MEDICAL CENTER HOSPITAL, ODESSA, TEXAS

We do see some heart attacks, but I don't think it's specific to Thanksgiving — it's what led up to Thanksgiving if you're leading a lifestyle where you're not eating right, not exercising, you're smoking and your cholesterol's out-of-control. That said, there's holiday heart syndrome, which is associated with alcohol: Once in a while you can go into an abnormal heart rhythm from drinking heavy amounts of alcohol, where your atria — the top part of your heart — starts fibrillating a little bit. People come in complaining of a racing heart, or thinking they're having a heart attack.

Unfortunately domestic violence can also happen, especially with the alcohol. Then there's depression. It's counterintuitive, but sometimes people are depressed during the holidays — they don't have support or family. People might come in feeling suicidal, but oftentimes depression is just generalized complaints, especially if someone is unfortunate enough to be homeless and it's cold outside.

There are football injuries, and there's always the turkey trots. I always encourage exercise — the problems from exercise are usually better than the problems from a lifestyle of not exercising! However, you've got to know your limits. You can't turn into an NFL player just from watching it on TV.

Everyone who ends up in the emergency room, the one thing they have in common is nobody expected to be there that day. Just like if you don't take care of your car, it's going to break down on the side of the highway one day.

So be thankful for your health, because it's not a given. But don't just be grateful on Thanksgiving! You need to live a life of healthfulness throughout the year.

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