

# Prevention

Health HEART HEALTH

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## Doing This Before Thanksgiving Dinner Can Lower Your Heart Attack Risk

NOVEMBER 23, 2016 By [MARYGRACE TAYLOR](#)



Come Thursday, taking a leisurely stroll might be the last thing on your mind. Who can think about exercising when you've got the daunting task of making sure a 10-pound bird and a countless number of side dishes all make it to the table without a mishap?

Still, in between all that cooking, it's worth making some time to lace up your sneakers. Don't worry, we're not talking about an hour workout here, just a few brisk laps around the block. Doing so just might help you keep your game face on in the kitchen—and resist the urge to dive into the stuffing before dinner, new research suggests.

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Compared to being inactive, hourly 5-minute microbursts of moderate exercise may boost your energy and stave off fatigue, and keep cravings at bay, finds a study published in the International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity. The extra movement increases blood flow, which could play a role in helping you feel alert. Being active is also thought to suppress hunger and act as a sort of buffer to take your mind off of food for a while, the researchers say.

That's not all. There's a more important reason why you should make some time to get moving before everyone starts piling their plates with turkey: The extra activity might be good for your heart.

It's no secret that regularly eating fatty, salty, sugary fare does bad things to your ticker. But even if you normally eat pretty clean, one over-the-top meal like Thanksgiving dinner could still hurt your heart, research shows. "Your body isn't able to metabolize everything fast enough. It stresses your system," says Nieca Goldberg, MD, a cardiologist at NYU Langone Medical Center. Loading up on salt and booze raises your blood pressure, while high blood sugar spikes can increase arterial inflammation and decrease blood vessel function. And mass quantities of saturated fat (we're looking at you, buttery mashed potatoes) literally flood your bloodstream, raising your cholesterol levels, she says.

Of course, going easy on the pie and gravy is one obvious option—on Thanksgiving and throughout the 6-week bingefest we call the holiday season. But all that deliciousness can be hard to resist, especially if it's one of those rare treats that you've been looking forward to for weeks.

A pre-dinner walk is the ticket to having your turkey and stuffing (in reasonable portions, natch) and eating it, too. Aerobic activity before a meal can help keep levels of unhealthy triglyceride-rich proteins in check in the bloodstream, found a review of some 70 studies published in the Journal of Applied Physiology.

How exactly does exercise help? When you're active, your body pumps out hormones like adrenaline that actually work to clear unhealthy particles from your bloodstream, says Adam Splaver, MD, a cardiologist at Memorial Regional Hospital South in Hollywood, Florida. It also makes your arteries more flexible, so they're better at constricting or expanding as needed. "By exercising, you promote good arterial health and prevent the deposition of bad cholesterol on the arterial wall," he says.

In short, a 10- to 15-minute walk before dinner is definitely a good idea. If you can squeeze in a half hour, even better. "Any exercise you do will help you mitigate the effects of Thanksgiving dinner," Splaver says. Someone else can man the stove for a little while.

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