**Turkey Dinner making you Sleepy?**

Guess what question I got asked a bunch of times this past holiday? Why does eating turkey always make me want to take a nap after dinner? Apparently, it’s the turkey that gets blamed for the after dinner lethargy. But the truth is, if you left the turkey out of the menu you’d still feel sleepy after a holiday meal.

Turkey contains an essential amino acid (which means that the body cannot manufacture it) that is called L-Tryptophan that has a documented sleep inducing effect. L-tryptophan is used in the body to produce the B-vitamin, niacin. Niacin, in turn, is used to produce serotonin, a neurotransmitter that brings on a calming agent for the brain and regulates sleep. Here’s the catch, L-tryptophan needs to be taken on an empty stomach and without any other amino acids in order for drowsiness to occur.

I’m not sure what your holiday dinner table looks like, but I know that mine is loaded with dishes full of other amino acids and proteins, so my turkey never gets eaten alone or on an empty stomach. Therefore, according to what the chemistry is stating, it shouldn’t be the L-tryptophan in the turkey that is making me sleepy.

It’s actually a carbohydrate-rich meal that increases the level of tryptophan in the brain and leads to serotonin synthesis. Carbohydrates stimulate the pancreas to secrete insulin. When this occurs, some amino acids that compete with tryptophan leave the bloodstream and enter muscle cells. This causes an increase in the relative concentration of tryptophan in the bloodstream. Serotonin is synthesized and you feel that familiar sleepy feeling.

Here’s what else, fats slow down the digestive system, giving that holiday meal more time to take effect. Fats also take a lot of time to digest, so the body will redirect blood to your digestive system to tackle the job of digestion of those fats you just consumed. Now that the blood flow is redirected to digestion, the rest of your body will feel less energetic after that holiday meal.

Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant. If you drink alcohol as part of the holiday celebration, that alcohol alone will add to the nap-factor.

Overeating takes a great deal of energy for your body to handle and to digest the increased amount of caloric input. A full stomach, forces the blood to be pulled away from other organ systems, including the nervous system. If the blood is pulled away, then the nervous system will once again be depressed. A large meal of any kind will make you want to nap, with or without turkey.

Believe it or not, many of us use the holidays to actually relax from our normal daily lives. What better time to relax, then after the craziness of meal planning, preparing and more importantly after the enjoyment of eating the holiday meal. So sitting back and relaxing after the meal is also a mind-set for many of us and there is nothing wrong with that. Naps can be helpful on many levels, so take nap if you want to.

After reading and researching why turkey makes us sleepy, it seems to me that it’s not the turkey at all, but the combination of the type of food, the amounts of food and the celebrations surrounding the food that are really making us sleepy during the holidays.

However, if you want to take advantage of the tryptophan in turkey, here’s what to do. When you have trouble getting to sleep one night while there is still leftover turkey in the refrigerator, you could have a late night snack of turkey. Don’t eat it with anything else, just the turkey. Nutritionists say that in this case turkey might provide just enough tryptophan on the empty stomach to produce serotonin and elicit sleep.

Remember, that if you want to “counter” that after meal sleepiness, go for a walk or do something physical. Then those endorphins will counter that serotonin and you’ll feel much more awake, feel better and work off some of those calories.

Have a wonderful holiday weekend, from your friends at MedX!