

Your Health



Holiday Heartburn

Thanks to high-stress levels and the plethora of acid-inducing foods present around the holidays, it's no wonder Americans are more at risk to heartburn during the winter months. According to the National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse, 20 percent of Americans suffer from reflux at least once a week.

You might not realize heartburn is only a symptom of a more serious disease known as gastroesophageal reflux, or GERD. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases states GERD occurs when your stomach contents come back up into your esophagus causing heartburn.

If you suffer from chronic heartburn, inquire with your healthcare professional about lifestyle changes or a prescription to help curb this disorder. It is more serious than temporary discomfort. Heartburn or acid reflux can potentially lead to life-threatening diseases.

This holiday season, keep an eye on how much and which types of food you ingest. Overeating foods that enhance your exposure to heartburn should be limited or completely avoided.

SYMPTOMS

While one of the most common symptoms of GERD that Americans suffer from is heartburn, there are many other levels of discomfort some may feel. Here is a look at other signs you should seek advice from your medical professional as reported by the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders.

- Difficulty swallowing;



- Hoarseness or sore throat;
- Dry cough;
- Sensation of a lump in your throat; or
- Regurgitation of food or sour liquid.

CAUSES

There are several causes that play a role in irritating GERD symptoms. Leaving behind these risky behaviors can reduce the frequency of

symptoms.

One big contributor to GERD is being overweight. Learning to eat a healthier diet and beginning an exercise regimen can mean losing weight and lessening your bouts with heartburn. Be cautious of the levels of caffeine and alcohol you ingest, as they also are large contributors to irritation.

Quit smoking. Not only

does it wreak havoc on integral organs in your body, it also is a known culprit of irritating GERD symptoms.

RISKS IF UNTREATED

Allowing GERD to go untreated invites potentially fatal diseases. Take a look at some of these serious consequences as reported by WebMD.

- Barrett's esophagus: About

five to 10 percent of people with GERD will develop this condition, in which stomach acid causes precancerous changes in cells.

- **Tooth decay:** Stomach acid can weaken the enamel of teeth, leading to early decay.

- **Esophageal cancer:** GERD can slightly increase your odds of developing this dangerous form of cancer.

Decrease Risk of Norovirus

Unless you have experienced norovirus firsthand, it's likely that you're unfamiliar with this incredibly contagious disease.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, norovirus is the leading cause of illness and outbreaks from contaminated food in the United States.

About 50 percent of all outbreaks of food-related sickness are created by norovirus. While it's possible to become infected with this illness any time during the year, trends show it is most common during the winter.

WHY WINTER?

With nicknames like “winter vomiting disease” and “winter vomiting bug,” winter norovirus is an American epidemic during cooler temperatures. The CDC states the peak season is November through April.

Since this virus spreads quickly in closed places, CDC experts believe winter diagnoses are more common because we tend to spend more time indoors. Traditionally, flu season also occurs during winter months in America, and norovirus happens to be one of the most common causes.

PREVENTION

In order to keep yourself and your loved ones free from contracting norovirus, be sure to follow the following prevention methods from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Make sure you are washing your hands with soap and hot water. This is extremely important after bathroom visits, before eating and while visiting public places. If you do happen to contract this virus, do not prepare your family's food while you are contagious. Norovirus spreads rapidly through food and can make your loved ones ill.

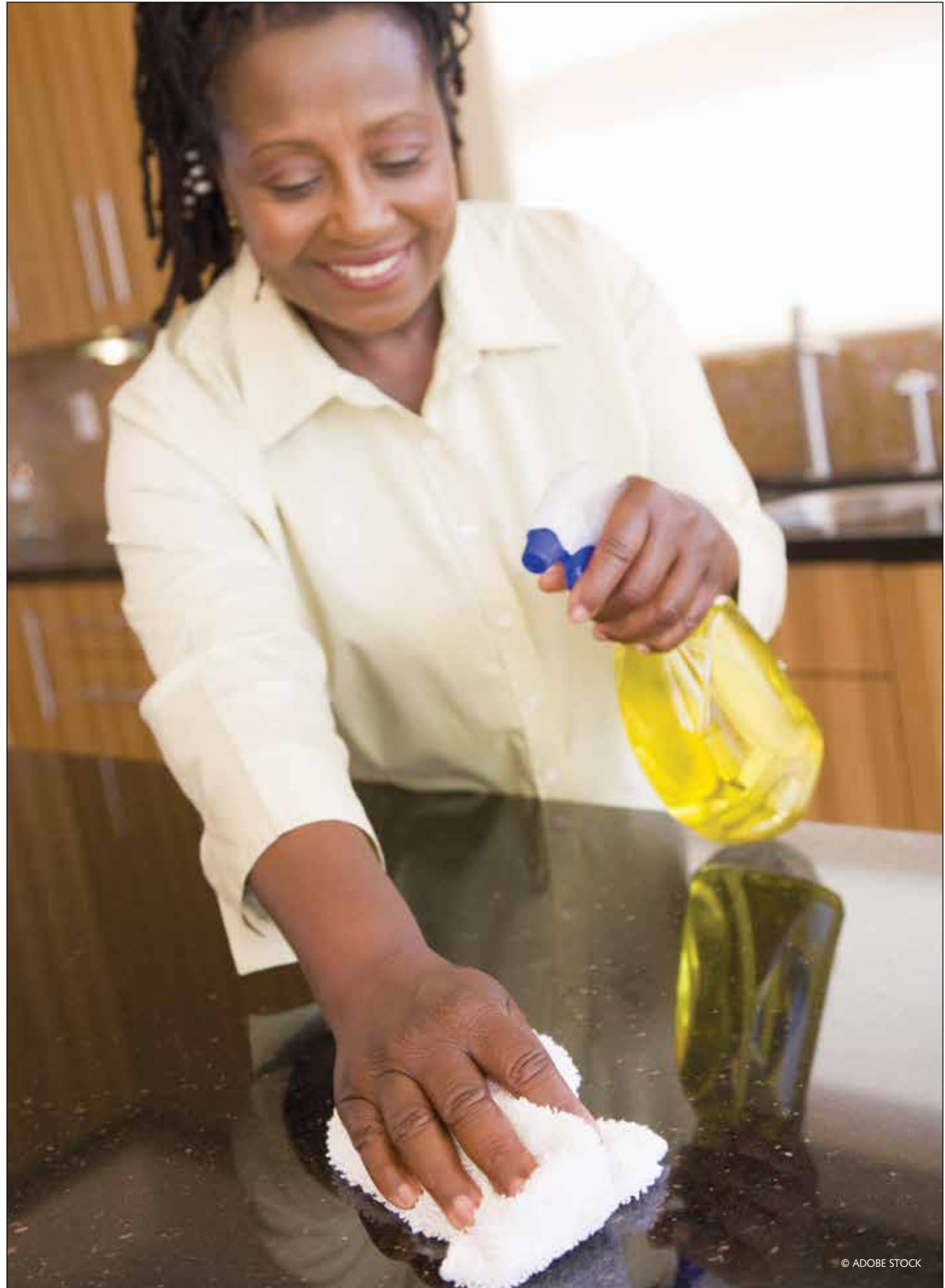
Disinfect all surfaces, such as toilets and countertops. Especially if an infected person is present in the house, it will lower the level of bacteria present, keeping the rest of the household healthy.

SCARY STATISTICS

To become more familiar with the risks involved with norovirus, read the following statistics reported by the CDC.

- Norovirus causes 19 million to 21 million cases of acute gastroenteritis each year in the United States;
- It is responsible for nearly 2 million outpatient visits each year, as well as 400,000 trips to the emergency room, usually by young children; and
- It is a main factor in about 56,000 to 71,000 hospitalizations and 570 to 800 deaths each year.

If you experience flu-like symptoms, nausea or stomach pain during the winter, chances are you might be developing this virus. Seek medical attention immediately.



Kids' Winter Health Tips

Winter gives parents the opportunity to experience the joys of the holidays and snow activities through their children's awe-struck eyes. It is their parents' job to make sure they remain safe and healthy while enjoying this exciting time of year.

Young children find themselves at more risk of developing dangerous illnesses from cold-weather conditions. Their developing bodies and immune systems can't defend against frigid temperatures the same way adults can.

Be aware of the following tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics to ensure a safe and healthy holiday season.

DRESS FOR THE SEASON

Children and infants should be dressed in layers when they will be participating in outdoor activities. Several thin layers will keep them warm and dry. Their core is not the only part that should be protected. Make sure to also provide warm gloves, hats and boots. Waterproof boots should be large enough to wear two pairs of socks comfortably.

IN THE CAR

If your child is still using a car seat, bulky clothes might hinder its protective ability. Instead, dress children in light clothing and drape a blanket over their bodies once they are buckled in. This allows the five-point harness of a car seat to tightly hold them in place during travel.

RISK OF HYPOTHERMIA

When a child's body tem-

perature falls below normal, hypothermia can set in. This is most common when a child is allowed to play outside without proper-protective clothing. Signs of hypothermia include a child shivering or becoming lethargic or clumsy. If you believe a risk is present, call

911 immediately. Wrap your child in a warm blanket indoors until help arrives.

FROSTBITE

Another instance of a child being dressed improperly, frostbite occurs when the skin and outer tissues become fro-

zen.

This can be easily avoided by protecting skin that might otherwise come in contact with snow or freezing temperatures. Blistering may occur in serious cases and will require immediate medical attention.

ILLNESS

Cold weather is not a culprit in developing colds or the flu. Bacteria is. Kids are exposed to other kids' germs at daycares, schools or playgroups. Teach them the importance of hand washing and sneezing into the bend of his elbow.



Diabetes and the Holidays

It can be hard to resist a spread of desserts or other unhealthy foods when they surround your dinner table. If you're suffering from diabetes, it is important to remember how dangerous your blood levels may become by consuming them. This year, put your focus on celebrating fun times with family rather than what's on the table.

Be honest with your family over the concerns you have about being faced with unhealthy decisions. Together, you can plan a get-together featuring healthy alternatives to your favorite holiday dishes. Consider using fat-free substitutions or create a brand-new recipe featuring an attractive spread of fruits and vegetables.

IMPORTANCE OF PLANNING AHEAD

For diabetics, timing is everything. The American Diabetes Association recommends planning your family meals to coordinate with your regular eating schedule. If it just isn't possible to get everyone together at the same time, there is an alternative.

Being required to take insulin injections or medicines to lower blood glucose means you must stick to a strict eating schedule. You can adjust to a different schedule by consuming a small snack during your normal meal time. To be safe, check with your professional health team to ensure this practice won't have negative effects.

It also is important to be selective about what you consume at the dinner table. Holiday staples are full of carbohydrates and sugars. Sampling a little of everything



can throw your blood sugar levels off balance. Choose to eat only smaller portions of your favorite dishes. You'll thank yourself later.

STAY ACTIVE

Even if you try your best, you will likely consume a little more during the holidays

than you typically would. While it's best to avoid over-eating, being physically active can lessen the impact the extra calories have on your body.

Start a new holiday tradition that involves getting the whole family on board with being active. Take walks

around the neighborhood or play outdoor games with your children or grandchildren.

REST

Making sure your sleep quality remains intact is crucial during the holidays. The extra stress caused by hectic schedules and shopping can

disrupt your condition. Stick to these tips from the National Sleep Foundation:

- Avoid napping as it can throw off your rhythm;
- Keep your room between 60 and 67 degrees to add to your comfortability; and
- See your doctor if you are having trouble falling asleep.

Maintain Vitamin D Levels

The most effective way to get the vitamin D your body needs to function properly is by exposing bare skin to the sun. This can be difficult during winter, as even if the sun is out, it might be too cold to step outside.

Luckily, there are efficient supplements available to get what you need in the winter.

WHY VITAMIN D IS IMPORTANT

Vitamin D is crucial in maintaining strong bones. The National Institutes of Health says it achieves this by helping the body absorb calcium, which is one of the main building blocks of bones.

It also plays a role in muscle and nerve performance. Nerves need vitamin D to carry messages between the brain and each of your body's parts. Without it, your immune system can't fight off invading bacteria and viruses as efficiently.

Older adults benefit from its qualities, as it protects from developing osteoporosis.

SYMPTOMS OF DEFICIENCY

According to the National Institutes of Health, non-Hispanic black Americans tend to



have the lowest levels of Vitamin D, whereas non-Hispanic whites have the highest. This winter, ask your doctor to measure your levels to ensure your body is getting the amount it needs.

A deficiency in these important vitamins can lead to these serious health issues:

- Increased risk of death

from cardiovascular disease;

- Cognitive impairment in older adults; and
- Severe asthma conditions, especially in children.

Deficiencies have even been linked to cancer.

You also might experience bone pain and muscle weakness when facing a deficiency. Some symptoms are subtle but

can have disastrous results if not acted upon.

GETTING VITAMIN D

Vitamin D is most effectively consumed from the sun's natural ways or by taking supplements. Before ingesting these supplements, check with your physician to ensure your body can benefit from them. Some

conditions, such as kidney, liver or hormonal disease, can be disturbed.

Although, there are only small levels of the vitamin in certain foods, you still can add a little by incorporating certain items into your diet.

Fatty fish, beef liver, egg yolks and fortified cereals all feature some vitamin D.



© ADOBE STOCK

Avoiding SAD

Do you have to fight to roll out of bed once the temperatures drop and the sun stays hidden when your alarm clock rings? Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a real condition Americans experience, and it is heightened during the cold-weather season.

SAD is a type of depression that follows a pattern associated with changing seasons. The National Institute of Mental Health reports it typically starts in late fall or early winter and fades as temperatures begin to rise.

ARE YOU AFFECTED?

While it is not common for Americans to have difficulty adjusting to a new schedule forced by a new season, it doesn't automatically mean you are depressed or experiencing Seasonal Affective Disorder.

The NIH states that for a person to be diagnosed with SAD, he must meet

full criteria for major depression coinciding with specific seasons for at least two years.

Here are some symptoms involved with major depression:

- Feeling hopeless or worthless;
- Experiencing consistently low energy levels;
- Losing interest in hobbies you once enjoyed;
- Problems with sleep;
- Drastic changes in appetite or weight; and
- Having frequent thoughts of death or suicide.

If you or anyone you know is experiencing thoughts of suicide, call the

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.

RISKS OF A SAD DIAGNOSIS

It is important to know your risks when talking about this serious disorder. These statistics from the National Institute of Mental Health are meant to highlight attributes that may increase the risk you face:

- **Being female:** Seasonal Affective Disorder is diagnosed four times more often in women than men.
- **Family history:** Families with a history of forms of depression are more likely to develop SAD than people whose families do not have a history.

• **Being young:** Younger adults have a higher risk of developing SAD than older adults. Cases have been found in teens and even children.

TREATMENT

Mental health is something everyone should take seriously. If you experience any of the symptoms of SAD or fear that you are at risk of Seasonal Affective Disorder, it is crucial to seek treatment from a professional.

Treatment typically includes medication, light therapy, psychotherapy or Vitamin D. Your healthcare professional can determine the most effective method based on your unique situation.

Senior Health Concerns



© ADOBE STOCK

As winter weather arrives, so do more serious risks for elderly people in America. Frigid temperatures can irritate serious health problems. You should know some common concerns associated with winter that may affect you or your loved ones.

For elderly Americans, a physical checkup before winter arrives can help expose health concerns that might require extra attention when the cold arrives. Do yourself a favor and set up an appointment with your doctor before winter weather makes it more difficult to travel to the doctor's office.

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

Do you know the role cold weather plays in affecting blood pressure? To conserve

heat and maintain healthy body temperatures, blood vessels narrow while blood pressure rises, making the heart work harder to ensure blood is moving properly.

This results in the tissue that makes up the walls of arteries becoming stressed and possibly damaged. Introducing plaque to these damaged areas can lead to blood clots and ultimately cause a heart attack or stroke.

According to AARP, some good ways to keep your blood

pressure regulated during the cold are to eat healthy fruits and vegetables, avoid salts and alcohol and stick to your exercise regimen.

LUNG ISSUES

Cold air creates more problems for those who experience asthma, COPD or emphysema. This cooler oxygen makes breathing difficult, as it causes airways to tighten. When traveling outdoors, AARP recommends wearing a face mask and breathing through your

nose in order to filter, warm and humidify the air before it reaches your lungs.

Remaining active is another great way to boost your lung health. If it's too cold to get outside, follow an exercise video to get your blood pumping.

Always check with your doctor before beginning an intense cardio routine if you suffer from a heart condition.

HEART ATTACK

Always pay attention to how

your heart reacts to physical activity. If you must get outside to shovel snow from your driveway, it's important to pace yourself.

AARP states arteries respond to cold by constricting, making people more prone to heart attacks. Experts state that heart attacks increase more than 50 percent during the winter. This is thought to be due to variations in blood pressure, and cholesterol and changes in the immune system may be contributors.