

When the last bite of turkey is consumed and the plates are cleared, the next item on the Thanksgiving agenda is a nap. Because turkey makes you sleepy, right? Darren Scott, food scientist at Oklahoma State University's Robert M. Kerr Food and Agricultural Products Center, debunks this myth. "It's not really the turkey that makes us sleepy," Scott said. "It's reputed to be the Tryptophan instead. There's really not that much more Tryptophan in turkey than in other poultry." Scott said there is approximately a quarter of a gram of Tryptophan per 100 grams of poultry. "Tryptophan is an essential amino acid, which means it's a nutrient we cannot normally produce in our body," he said. "We have to get it from the foods we eat."

Along with turkey, Tryptophan is found in foods that are high in protein, such as red meat, chicken, fish, chocolate, soy, eggs, cheese, milk, almonds, peanuts, and pumpkin and sesame seeds. Thanksgiving menus contain a copious amount of foods high in sugars and carbohydrates, which contribute to drowsiness, too, Scott said. "As we digest the turkey and the other carbohydrates, we indirectly influence the amount of serotonin we have in our brains," Scott said. "The serotonin gets metabolized into melatonin, and it's the melatonin that we think actually makes us drowsy." FAPC, a part of OSU's Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, helps to discover, develop and deliver technical and business information that stimulates and supports the growth of value-added food and agricultural products and processing in Oklahoma. Featured video