

BROADCAST-Deep breaths might help before a holiday meal

ANCHOR INTRO:

A new reminder before you sit down to a big holiday meal: taking a few deep breaths might help your digestion. An OSF HealthCare gastroenterologist says emerging research shows a powerful two-way link between the brain and the gut — all connected by the vagus nerve.

VO or RADIO PACKAGE

The vagus nerve is the body's longest nerve — a superhighway carrying messages between the brain, stomach and intestines. And Dr. Omar Khokhar says when it's stressed, digestion can suffer.

Chronic stress, poor sleep or anxiety can throw off what's known as "vagal tone," making the gut more reactive and less efficient. But Dr. Khokhar says simple deep breathing can help reset that system — especially before or after a heavy holiday meal.

SOT – Dr. Omar Khokhar, OSF HealthCare

"Kind of like you restart your phone or computer. It's a very similar concept. Let's clean it out. Let's do some deep breathing for five or 10 minutes. It's all it takes. Then the vagus nerve says, 'OK, I'm more relaxed here. I can then do my job, which is to secrete hormones, to squeeze and to help with the GI tract.'" (:20)

REPORTER TRACK:

Dr. Khokhar says early evidence shows deep breathing, meditation and even humming support the nerve's function. His go-to method? The 4-4-4 technique — inhaling for four seconds, holding for four, then exhaling for four.