Christmas treats and their downsides

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A medical-humorous look at the festive meal

(Slovenia, 2013. Machine advertising cancel "Nuremberg – City of the world-famous gingerbread" in Fraktur typeface: first documented in 1968 from the Nuremberg railway post office (BPA) (example on Delcampe), last used in 1991 (example in the postmark database). The cancel was apparently used seasonally—each year from autumn until New Year's.)

"'I can't eat another bite!'"—this phrase is heard more often on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day than the word "presents." Between roast goose, red cabbage, and gingerbread, a familiar physiological drama unfolds each year: the digestive system bravely battles a flood of calories it hasn't encountered since the Middle Ages. From a biological point of view, Christmas is not a festival of love, but a festival of postprandial survival..

As early as the 18th century, the physician Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland complained that the "excesses of the table" were the most common cause of "digestive weakness and heaviness of the head." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's personal physician understood dietetics not as renunciation, but as an art of living: the harmonious balance of body, mind, and soul. Health, he believed, flourished through moderation, joy, and closeness to nature—virtues that are often lost at the festive table..

Sonderstempel C.W. Hufeland – DDR 1965

Today, medicine refers more elegantly to Hufeland's "heaviness of the head" as postprandial fatigue: that energy slump after eating, when blood flow and attention shift from the brain to the abdomen. While the family debates dessert, the pancreas works at full throttle: insulin surges, triglycerides rise, the liver spins into action. The body turns into a Christmas workshop of metabolic chemistry.

While gingerbread was being advertised elsewhere, Bad Kissingen focused on digestion: a machine cancel (1962) promoting a spa cure for the stomach, intestines, liver, and bile—essentially the philatelic response to an excess of Christmas cheer.

Between goose and bile

The festive roast is a biochemical minefield: protein, fat, alcohol, and sugar combined in a way that would put any professor of nutritional science on high alert. Fat delays gastric emptying, alcohol irritates the mucous membranes while simultaneously inhibiting fat metabolism. The gallbladder frantically produces digestive juices as the overfilled stomach sends signals to the brain: "Please stop!"—yet the hostess offers seconds.

Anyone who then sinks into the sofa experiences what physicians call *orthostatic hypotension after food intake*: blood pools in the abdomen, circulation slows, eyelids close. Popular parlance calls it a "food coma." From an evolutionary perspective, this makes sense—after a feast in the Stone Age, there were no more appointments to keep.

Herbal remedies can help against bloating—especially the classic trinity: anise (Tunisia 2011), fennel (Taiwan 2014), and caraway (GDR 1977). They are most effective when taken as a tea—which warms, soothes, and reliably relieves gas. In liquid form with alcohol, such as herbal liqueurs, they may help the spirits, but for the gut flora they are more of a double-edged pleasure. And by the way: *meteorism*, the medical term for abdominal bloating, has nothing to do with meteorites—even if the pressure wave can sometimes feel similar.

The silent explosion in the belly

One to two hours later, the gut flora takes over the lead role. Billions of bacteria begin fermenting carbohydrates that remained undigested. This produces hydrogen, methane, and carbon dioxide—and the contemplative evening turns into a quiet chamber concert of gases. Ancient humoral pathology spoke of “excess winds”; modern medicine calls it meteorism. The simplest therapy? Movement—and humor. Both require courage when one is groaning beneath the blanket.

The social side of digestion

Eating at Christmas is more than biochemistry - it is social medicine. Studies show that eating together strengthens bonds, reduces stress, and promotes emotional well-being—provided the stomach cooperates. The “Christmas belly” thus also becomes a symbol of belonging: a soft organ with a social function.

Philatelic table delights

Philately, too, knows a healthy appetite. Postage stamps from around the world tell culinary stories: *Saint Helena* (1997) depicts a British Christmas table; *Guernsey* (1982) shows a Dickensian family at a festive meal. *Ghana* (1976) celebrates shared laughter, while *Latvia* (2018) honors bread and pastries as symbols of quiet contentment.In the tropics, the plates glow more colorfully: *Nevis* (2008) features ham and roasts; *Anguilla* (1978, 1999) shows generously filled bowls; and the *Cayman Islands* (2000) remind us that food is memory—and memory, as Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland might have said, prolongs life..

The Philippine series *Maligayang Pasko!* (2018) is particularly charming: four stamps depict the traditional *Noche Buena* with *lechon*, rice, and fruit—a celebration of familial digestive resilience. *Hong Kong* (2020) serves dim sum beneath the Christmas tree; *Poland* (1997) links fasting and feasting; and *Australia* (Christmas Island 2019, 1999), *Jersey* (2013), *Austria* (2018), *Sweden* (2013), *Finland* (1980), *Tuvalu* (2009), *Iceland* (2007), *Switzerland* (2020), and *Belgium* (2020)

honor baked goods as sweet cultural heritage. These miniatures tell what medicine has long known: food is therapy, and sharing it is the oldest remedy against loneliness.

Between stomach and humanity

Christmas remains a balancing act between digestion and discipline. Medicine calls for moderation, culture for conviviality—the truth lies somewhere between goose and composure. Even Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland would have recognized in this tension the essence of his teaching: health arises from moderation, joy, and humanity. Perhaps a walk after the meal is the best therapy—it gets circulation and conversation moving and saves the feast from its own metabolism.

> *"Celebrate with heart, not with excess; savor the foods of nature, the light of the candles, and the warmth of people—therein lies the true macrobiotics of the feast."*

And whoever can laugh while digesting has understood the essence of Christmas.

Medizinphilatelistische Neuheiten: aus dem Internet (Colnect, DBZ, etc.) – dvw

Ausgaben, die zwar von Postverwaltungen genehmigt, jedoch im Land nicht verkauft und nur an Briefmarkenhändler ausgegeben werden (Agency Issues), werden hier nicht berücksichtigt. Auch nicht aufgenommen sind - bis auf wenige Ausnahmen - personalisierte Marken.

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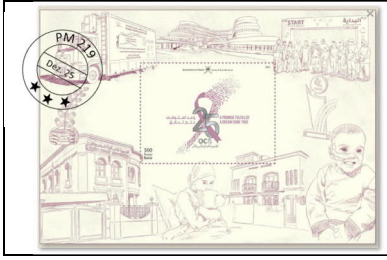	**Oman** • 2025-10 • 25 Jahre Krebsgesellschaft		**Indien** • 2025-10-01 • Militärischer Pflegedienst