



Cooking Tips
for a

SAFE TURKEY

A turkey can contain a variety of bacteria that could make you sick. It is important to prepare and cook it safely to prevent food poisoning.

1. Buying and Storing

Fresh Turkey

- Purchase a fresh turkey only 1 to 2 days prior to cooking.
- Refrigerate until you are ready to cook it. Place on a pan or tray to catch any juices that may leak.

Frozen Turkey

- Keep frozen until you are ready to thaw.
- USDA recommends only purchasing frozen pre-stuffed turkeys labelled with its USDA or state mark of inspection.

2. Thawing

In the Refrigerator (40 °F or below)	
<i>Allow approximately 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds</i>	
4 to 12 pounds	1 to 3 days
12 to 16 pounds	3 to 4 days
16 to 20 pounds	4 to 5 days
20 to 24 pounds	5 to 6 days
In Cold Water	
<i>Allow approximately 30 minutes per pound</i>	
4 to 12 pounds	2 to 6 hours
12 to 16 pounds	6 to 8 hours
16 to 20 pounds	8 to 10 hours
20 to 24 pounds	10 to 12 hours

- When thawing in cold water, the turkey should be wrapped securely to prevent the water from leaking through.
- Place wrapped turkey in a sink full of cold water. Every 30 minutes, change the water. Cook the turkey immediately after thawing. Do not refreeze.

Thawing in the Microwave Oven:

- Please reference your microwave user's manual for the size of turkey that will fit into the microwave oven, the minutes per pound, and the power level to use for thawing.
- If you thaw the turkey in the microwave, cook it immediately after thawing.
- Remove packaging and the giblets.
- Ensure that the juices are caught on a microwave-safe dish.

3. Roasting

- The oven temperature should not be set lower than 325 °F.
- It is not recommended to stuff a turkey. It is safer to cook the stuffing outside the bird in a casserole dish.
- If you choose to stuff your turkey, the stuffing must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F.
- Check the internal temperature of the turkey in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. The internal temperature should reach 165 °F when measured with a food thermometer.
- If your turkey has a "pop-up" temperature indicator, it is recommended that you also check the temperature with a food thermometer.
- For the best quality, allow the turkey stand for 20 minutes before carving to allow juices to set. The turkey will be easier to carve.



Remember! Always wash hands, utensils, the sink, and anything else that comes in contact with raw turkey and its juices with soap and water.

Timetables for Roasting a Turkey

Unstuffed	
4 to 8 pounds (breast)	1½ to 3¼ hours
8 to 12 pounds	2¾ to 3 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3¾ hours
14 to 18 pounds	3¾ to 4¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4¼ to 4½ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4½ to 5 hours
Stuffed	
4 to 6 pounds (breast)	Not usually applicable
6 to 8 pounds (breast)	2½ to 3½ hours
8 to 12 pounds	3 to 3½ hours
12 to 14 pounds	3½ to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	4 to 4¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4¼ to 4¾ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4¾ to 5¼ hours

References:

1. USDA-FSIS. (2023, Nov 17). Let's Talk Turkey-A Consumer Guide to Safely Roasting a Turkey: <https://bit.ly/3gcGmlK>
2. CDC. (2024, April 29). Preparing Your Holiday Turkey Safely: <https://go.unl.edu/cdc-turkey>

4. Storing Leftovers

- The turkey, stuffing, and gravy should be discarded if left out at room temperature longer than two hours; one hour if the temperature is above 90 °F.
- Reduce the size of leftovers. Use shallow containers for storage and freeze if needed.
- Use refrigerated turkey, stuffing, and gravy within three to four days.
- If frozen, use leftovers within 2 to 6 months for best quality.

5. Reheating

Cooked turkey may be eaten cold or reheated.

Reheating in the Oven

- The oven should be set no lower than 325 °F.
- Add a little broth or water on top of the turkey to keep it moist. Cover.
- Reheat turkey until it reaches an internal temperature of 165 °F. Use a food thermometer to check the temperature.

Reheating in the Microwave Oven

- Rotate food to ensure even heating.
- Make sure the turkey reaches an internal temperature of 165 °F by checking with a food thermometer.
- Find the recommended times and power levels in the owner's manual for your microwave oven.

