

The Dish

November 2024
Marshall County Health Department
Food Safety Newsletter



Let's Talk Turkey



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Thanksgiving Day is just around the corner, and it's time to get ready. Here are answers to important food safety questions so you can cook your turkey safely.

Q: How long does it take to thaw a turkey?

A: The time it takes to thaw a turkey depends on which of these three thawing methods you choose:

- ◆ Refrigerator thaw method (recommended): 24 hours for every five pounds.
- ◆ Cold water bath method: 30 minutes per pound.
- ◆ Microwave method: follow instructions in the owner's manual.

The turkey should never be thawed on the counter or in hot water and must not be left at room temperature for more than two hours.

Q: Should I wash my turkey?

A: No. Washing or rinsing any meat or poultry is NOT recommended, and actually increases the risk you will spread germs to other foods you're preparing.

Q: Should I stuff my turkey?

A: We do not recommend stuffing a turkey for food safety reasons. When stuffed, it takes a longer time to cook the turkey, and you must make sure the innermost part of the stuffing has also reached 165°F. This can be challenging with large birds.

Q: Should I roast my turkey breast side up or down?

A: We recommend cooking a whole turkey breast side up if it is being roasted in the oven.

Q: How long do you cook a turkey in an oven bag?

A: Oven cooking bags are safe and can be an effective way to speed up the cooking process. For whole, unstuffed turkeys in oven cooking bags, cook at 350°F for the following approximate times:



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Size of Turkey (in Pounds)	Cooking Time
8-12 lbs	1.5 to 2 hours
12-16 lbs	2 to 2.5 hours
16-20 lbs	2.5 to 3 hours
20-24 lbs	3 to 3.5 hours

Refer to the manufacturer-provided instructions on the oven bags for specific timetables. If you choose to stuff your turkey, add 30 minutes to the times.

Q: How do you cook a turkey in an electric roaster oven?

A: Generally, the cooking time and oven temperature setting are the same as for conventional cooking. Always check the roaster's use and care manual for the manufacturer's recommended temperature settings. Preheat the oven to at least 325°F. Place the turkey on the roaster oven rack or other meat rack so the turkey is raised out of the juices that collect in the bottom of the oven liner. Leave the lid on throughout cooking, removing it as little as possible to avoid slowing the cooking process. Cooking bags can be used in the roaster oven if the bag does not touch the sides, bottom, or lid.



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Q: Is it safe to cook a turkey overnight at a low temperature?

A: It is not safe to cook any poultry in an oven set lower than 325°F. At lower temperatures, poultry stays in the “Danger Zone” (between 40° to 135°F) for too long.

Q: When do I know my turkey or turkey breast is ready?

A: The turkey is ready when it reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F as measured with a food thermometer. Check the internal temperature in the thickest part of the breast, the innermost part of the thigh, and the innermost part of the wing. If stuffed, make sure the innermost part of the stuffing also reaches 165°F before you stop cooking the turkey.



Q: What about the leftover turkey?

A: Follow these tips to safely store and reheat your leftover turkey:

- ◆ Cut the turkey into smaller pieces so it will cool quickly.
- ◆ Refrigerate leftover turkey at 40°F or colder within 2 hours of cooking to prevent food poisoning. You do not need to wait until the turkey is cool to store it in the refrigerator or freezer.
- ◆ Eat cooked turkey and dishes made with it, such as soup or a casserole, within three days. Freeze leftover turkey to store it for longer.
- ◆ Reheat all leftovers to at least 165°F before serving or eating.

Meat & Poultry Hotline:

If you have any additional questions, you can call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline toll-free at **1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)** to talk to a food safety expert, or chat live at ask.usda.gov from 10 am to 6 pm Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. If you need help on Thanksgiving Day, the Meat and Poultry Hotline is available from 8 am to 2 pm Eastern Time.