

Turkey: Safe Thawing and Cooking

MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH CONSUMER FACT SHEET

Handle Food Safely

- Always wash your hands before and after handling food.
- Keep the kitchen, dishes and utensils clean.
- Always serve food on clean plates.
- Do not use the same platter and utensils for raw and cooked meat/poultry.

Fresh Turkey

- Buy the turkey only 1 or 2 days before you plan to cook it.
- Keep it stored in the refrigerator until you're ready to cook it. Place it on a tray or pan to catch any juices that may leak.
- Do not buy fresh pre-stuffed turkeys. If not handled properly, harmful bacteria that may be in the stuffing can multiply rapidly.

Frozen Turkey

- Keep frozen until you're ready to thaw it.
- Turkeys can be kept in the freezer indefinitely. However, cook turkeys within 1 year for the best quality.

Thawing Your Turkey

There are three ways to thaw your turkey safely:

- **Thawing in the Microwave Oven:** Check your owner's manual for the minutes per pound and the power level to use for thawing. Remove all outside wrapping. Place on a microwave-safe dish to catch any juices that might leak. Cook your turkey immediately after thawing in the microwave. Do not refreeze.
- **Thawing in the Refrigerator:** Keep the turkey in its original wrapper. Place it on a try to catch any juices that may leak. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 days. If necessary, a turkey that has been properly thawed in the refrigerator may be refrozen.
- **Thawing in Cold Water:** Wrap your turkey securely, making sure water is not able to leak through the wrapping. Submerge the wrapped turkey in cold tap water. Change the water every 30 minutes. Cook the turkey immediately after it is thawed. Do not refreeze.

Thawing in the refrigerator	Time to thaw (allow 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds)
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

Thawing in cold water	Time to thaw (allow 30 minutes per pound)
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

REMINDER: Remove the giblets from the turkey cavities after thawing. Cook separately.

Roasting Your Turkey

- Set your oven temperature no lower than 325°F.
- Place the turkey on a rack in a shallow roasting pan.
- For more even cooking, it is recommended that you cook your stuffing outside the bird in a casserole dish. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the stuffing. The center should reach at least 165°F.
- If you choose to stuff your turkey, fill the cavity just before cooking. Fill the cavities loosely. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the stuffing. The center should reach at least 165°F.
- To check the doneness of a whole turkey, insert a food thermometer in the thickest part of the inner thigh without touching the bone. A whole turkey should be cooked to 180°F.
- To check the doneness of a turkey breast, insert a food thermometer in the thickest part of the breast. A turkey breast should be cooked to 170°F.
- If your turkey has a pop-up temperature indicator, it is recommended that you also check the internal temperature of the turkey and the stuffing. (Remember, a whole turkey should be cooked to 180°F; 170°F for turkey breasts, and 165°F for stuffing.)
- Let the turkey stand for 20 minutes after cooking. It will carve more easily.
- Remove all stuffing from the turkey cavities.

REMEMBER: Always wash (with soap and water) hands, utensils, the sink, and anything else that comes in contact with raw turkey and its juices.

Timetables for Turkey Roasting (325°F):

- These times are estimates.
- Always use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of your turkey (180°F) and stuffing (165°F).

Storing Leftover Turkey

- Throw away turkey, stuffing, and gravy left out at room temperature longer than 2 hours (1 hour in temperatures above 90°F).
- Divide leftovers into small portions. Refrigerate or freeze in covered shallow containers for quicker cooling.
- Use refrigerated turkey and stuffing within 3 to 4 days. Use gravy within 1 to 2 days.
- If freezing, use leftovers within 2 to 6 months for best quality.

Reheating Leftovers

Reheat turkey, stuffing, and gravy to 165°F.

Minnesota Department of Health

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UNSTUFFED Turkey	Time to cook
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 Turkey	Time to cook
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