



## **Turkey Tips**



## Safer Christmas Eating

### Top tips

- Always make sure poultry is properly cooked before serving.
- Keep raw poultry away from ready-to-eat foods.
- Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling raw poultry.
- After preparing poultry, clean all utensils and worktops.
- Store poultry carefully (when raw or cooked) to prevent food poisoning bacteria from growing and spreading.
- Don't reheat poultry more than once.

### Defrosting

If your turkey is frozen, make sure it is properly defrosted before you cook it. If it is still partially frozen, recommended cooking times will not be long enough to cook it thoroughly. This means bacteria that cause food poisoning could survive the cooking process. So, before you start cooking, make sure there are not any ice crystals in the cavity. You could also test the thicker parts of the turkey with a fork, to tell whether the meat feels frozen.

It is very important to work out defrosting time in advance, so you know how much time to allow - it can take at least a couple of days for a large turkey to thaw (see estimated times below).

When you start defrosting, take the turkey out of its packaging and put it on a large dish. This is to hold the liquid that comes out as the turkey thaws. Remove the giblets and the neck as soon as possible, because this speeds up thawing.

Giblets are raw meat, so they should either be cooked immediately, or stored in a sealed container in the fridge until you cook them. Always wash your hands thoroughly after handling raw turkey, giblets or any other raw meat.

Put the dish in a cool, clean place (ideally the fridge) where the turkey will not touch other foods. If it is not possible to defrost your turkey in the fridge, you could use a cool room, or a garage.

Remember that the temperature of the place where the turkey is kept will affect thawing times.

If you are defrosting your turkey somewhere cold, such as the garage or garden shed, watch out for sudden extremes in temperature, if it gets very cold (or very warm), this could mean the turkey won't defrost properly or won't be kept cold enough. Keep the turkey covered and make sure that pets and young children are kept away.

You could also defrost it at room temperature, but make sure it does not touch or drip onto other foods (and it is important to make sure you cook it properly).

Pour away the liquid that comes out of the defrosting turkey regularly, to stop it overflowing and spreading bacteria. But be careful not to splash the liquid onto worktops, dishes, cloths or other food. And remember to wash your hands.

To work out the defrosting time for your turkey, check the packaging. If there are not any defrosting instructions, use the following times as a rough guide for how long it will take to thaw your turkey (but remember to check that it's fully thawed before cooking).

- In a fridge at 4°C (39°F), allow about 10 to 12 hours per kg, but remember not all fridges will be this temperature.
- In a cool room (below 17.5°C, 60°F) allow approximately 3 to 4 hours per kg, longer if the room is particularly cold.
- At room temperature (about 20°C, 68°F) allow approximately 2 hours per kg.

You can also check our defrosting calculator.

## Preparing

It is very important to keep raw poultry away from food that is ready to eat. This is because if raw poultry, or other raw meat, touches (or drips onto) these foods, bacteria will spread.

Remember, bacteria can also spread from raw meat and poultry to worktops, chopping boards, dishes and utensils. So, to keep your Christmas food safe, remember to do the following things:

- Always keep raw poultry away from other foods, to help stop bacteria spreading.
- Store raw poultry at the bottom of the fridge so it cannot drip onto other foods.
- Always clean worktops, chopping boards, dishes and utensils thoroughly after they have touched raw poultry.
- Always wash your hands with warm water and soap, and dry them thoroughly, after touching raw poultry.
- Never use the same chopping board for raw poultry and ready-to-eat food without washing it thoroughly in warm soapy water. (If possible, use a separate chopping board just for raw meat and poultry.)
- Do not wash your turkey (or other poultry) - this is because bacteria can splash onto worktops, dishes and other foods. Proper cooking will kill any bacteria, so you do not need to wash poultry.

## Cooking

Always make sure turkey is properly cooked before you serve it, because eating undercooked turkey (or other poultry) could cause food poisoning. These are the three main ways to tell if a turkey is cooked:

- The meat should be piping hot all the way through.
- When you cut into the thickest part of the meat, none of the meat should be pink.
- If juices run out when you pierce the turkey, or when you press the thigh, they should be clear.

It is very important to plan your cooking time in advance, to make sure you get the turkey in the oven early enough to cook it thoroughly. A large turkey can take several hours to cook properly.

Often, cooking advice is included on the turkey's packaging, or you can look in your oven handbook, or in a cookery book.

As a general guide, for a turkey under 4.5kg allow 45 minutes per kg plus 20 minutes; for one weighing between 4.5kg and 6.5kg 40 minutes per kg; and for those over 6.5kg 35 minutes per kg at 180°C, 350°F, Gas Mark 4 (after the oven has preheated).

Remember, some ovens, such as fan-assisted ovens might cook the turkey more quickly check the manufacturer's handbook for your oven if you can. The main message is always to check that the meat is properly cooked before serving.

These cooking times are based on an unstuffed turkey. If you are unsure, it better to cook your stuffing in a roasting tin, rather than inside the turkey, so the turkey will cook more easily and cooking guidelines will be more accurate. (If you cook your turkey with the stuffing inside, you will need to allow extra time for the amount of stuffing and allow for the fact that the bird cooks more slowly.)

Remember, other birds, such as goose and duck, need different cooking times. In an oven at 220°C/425°F/Gas Mark 7, goose should be cooked for 35 minutes per kg, once the oven has preheated. Duck should be cooked for 45 minutes per kg at 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6. The oven should always be hotter for duck and goose to melt the fat under the skin. They also need regular basting.

Remember, these times are based on cooking an unstuffed bird in a preheated oven, and they are only a guide. Always make sure poultry is properly cooked before serving.

If you are cooking portions of poultry, rather than a whole bird, you can follow the advice on the packaging or in a recipe, but always check that it's properly cooked.

After cooking, cool the turkey quickly (in no more than one to two hours) and then cover or place in a sealed container and put it in the fridge. Make sure you keep all ready-to-eat foods, including cooked poultry, away from raw meat.

## **Leftovers**

It is very important to keep cooked meat and poultry in the fridge. If it is left out at room temperature, food poisoning bacteria can grow and multiply. So try to take out only as much as you're going to use and leave the rest in the fridge.

Do not leave a plate of turkey or cold meats out all day, on a buffet for example. Put it back in the fridge as soon as you can, ideally within an hour.

If you are reheating leftover turkey, or other food, always make sure it's piping hot all the way through before you eat it. And do not reheat more than once. Ideally, try to use leftovers within 48 hours.