

LET'S TALK TURKEY

HOW MUCH TURKEY?

Whole turkey	1 pound per person or 1½ pounds per person if you want leftovers
Boneless breast of turkey	½ pound per person
Breast of turkey	¾ pound per person
Prestuffed frozen turkey*	1¼ pounds per person – keep frozen until ready to cook

*Note: The USDA only recommends frozen, prestuffed turkeys that display the USDA or a state mark of inspection on package. These turkeys have been processed under controlled conditions.

FRESH TURKEY

A fresh turkey should be purchased 1–2 days before cooking. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) does not recommend purchasing a fresh pre-stuffed turkey.

COOKING A FROZEN TURKEY

Cooking a frozen turkey is safe and is even USDA-approved. The cooking time will take at least 50% longer than for a fully thawed turkey. After 3 hours the cavity should be thawed enough to remove the bag of giblets and the neck. Cook the turkey without the giblets and neck in the cavity. Cook giblets and neck separately.



THAWING THE TURKEY

The best ways to safely thaw your turkey is in the refrigerator or in cold water. Keep the turkey in its original wrapper and place on a tray or pan to catch any liquids that may leak. DO NOT thaw poultry and other meat at room temperature.

Thawing time in the refrigerator (40 °F or below)

Allow 24 hours per 4 pounds of a whole turkey. Keep the turkey refrigerated for only 1–2 days after thawing. A turkey properly thawed in the refrigerator may be refrozen.

4 – 12 pounds	1 – 3 days
12 – 16 pounds	3 – 4 days
16 – 20 pounds	4 – 5 days
20 – 24 pounds	5 – 6 days

Thawing Time in Cold Water

Allow 30 minutes per pound of a whole turkey. Submerge the wrapped turkey in cold tap water. Change the water every 30 minutes to maintain cold temperature. Cook the turkey immediately after thawing. Do not refreeze the turkey.

4 – 12 pounds	2 – 6 hours
12 – 16 pounds	6 – 8 hours
16 – 20 pounds	8 – 10 hours
20 – 24 pounds	10 – 12 hours

DON'T WASH THE TURKEY!

According to the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, washing raw poultry, beef, pork, lamb, or veal before cooking is not recommended. Pathogens in raw meat and poultry juices can be spread to other foods, utensils, and surfaces.

Failure to clean these contaminated areas can lead to foodborne illness. Cooking to the right temperature kills the pathogens, so washing meat before cooking is not necessary.

TO STUFF OR NOT TO STUFF?

Stuffing the turkey means it takes longer to cook, and there's a greater risk of uneven cooking. The USDA recommends cooking the stuffing separately in a baking dish, which also gives it a nice crispy top.

However, if you choose to stuff your turkey, stuff loosely for optimum safety. The stuffing should be moist, not dry, since heat destroys pathogens more rapidly in a moist environment. NEVER stuff the turkey in advance. The stuffing may promote the rapid growth of harmful pathogens. Place the turkey immediately after stuffing in a preheated oven and cook.

TURKEY ROASTING

Use the following chart for the time to cook your turkey. The times are for fresh or thawed turkey in a 325°F oven.

	Unstuffed*	Stuffed
4 – 8 pound breast	1½ – 3¼ hours	Not applicable
8 – 12 pounds	2¾ – 3 hours	3 – 3½ hours
12 – 14 pounds	3 – 3¾ hours	3½ – 4 hours
14 – 18 pounds	3¾ – 4¼ hours	4 – 4¼ hours
18 – 20 pounds	4¼ – 4½ hours	4¼ – 4¾ hours
20 – 24 pounds	4½ – 5 hours	4¾ – 5¼ hours

*Remove giblets and neck from cavity.

The times are approximate, and doneness should always be checked with a food thermometer. Do not depend on a pop-up thermometer alone!

Always place the food thermometer tip in the thickest part of the thigh away from the bone. The dark meat of the turkey thigh takes longer to cook than any other part.

The minimum internal temperature should reach 165°F for the turkey and the stuffing. All turkey meat, including any that remains pink, is safe to eat as soon as all parts reach at least 165°F.

Allow the turkey to rest 15 to 20 minutes before carving to allow the juices to set.

STORING LEFTOVERS

Put all perishable leftover foods into shallow containers and place in the refrigerator or freezer within 2 hours. The quicker leftovers cool, the less time they spend in the food “Danger Zone” of 40–135°F.



Storage in the fridge:

Cut leftover turkey into small pieces; refrigerate stuffing and turkey separately in shallow containers. Refrigerate potatoes, gravy, and vegetables in shallow containers. The cooked leftovers are safe for 3 to 4 days in the refrigerator and can be frozen for longer storage.

Prompt storage helps prevent pathogens that cause foodborne illness from growing on leftovers. These pathogens can't be smelled or tasted. Food left out more than 2 hours should be discarded; 1 hour in temperatures above 90°F.

REHEATING TURKEY

Cooked turkey may be eaten cold or reheated. Reheat turkey and leftovers to an internal temperature of 165°F. Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature. To keep the turkey moist, add a little broth or water and cover.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- Your local University of Wyoming Extension Office, www.uwyo.edu/uwe.
- www.foodsafety.gov
- USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-888-674-6854
- www.AskKaren.gov



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