

Advice on cooking a turkey safely

It's important to prepare and cook your festive food safely. Every year people suffer food poisoning in December as a result of campylobacter bacteria, which is found in turkey and chicken.

Avoiding food poisoning

It's important that you handle, prepare and cook your turkey properly in order to kill campylobacter bacteria.

Christmas is a time when people often cook a bigger bird than they usually do. Nobody wants to be ill over the festive period especially with [food poisoning](#), which can have many unpleasant symptoms, such as:

- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- abdominal cramps

Top turkey tips

Remember these top tips for cooking your turkey.

Keep meat in fridge

Keep your fresh turkey and other raw poultry meat in the fridge until it's ready to use.

Make space in the fridge, try not to pack food too tightly as the cold air needs to circulate to keep all your food cool.

Keep raw foods separate from other ready-to-eat foods by putting raw meat in a covered container and placing on the bottom of the fridge to avoid cross-contamination.

Your fridge temperature should be running between 0 and 5°C.

Defrosting a frozen turkey

The time it takes to defrost a frozen turkey varies, so check the instructions on the packaging. For example, a typical large turkey weighing six to seven kg could take as much as four days to fully defrost in the fridge.

Do not defrost your turkey at room temperature.

When defrosting, leave it in the packaging (or cover and put it in a container to hold any thawing juices), then place at the bottom of the fridge

to avoid cross-contamination.

Defrost fully, otherwise your turkey may not cook evenly and harmful bacteria could survive the cooking process.

Some turkeys can be cooked from frozen if the manufacturer's instructions say so. If yours is one of these, always follow the manufacturer's advice.

Don't wash your turkey

Don't wash your turkey, or any other poultry or meat.

Washing poultry can spread germs by splashing onto cooking utensils, kitchen tops and anything else within reach – including you.

Cooking thoroughly will kill any bacteria, including campylobacter.

Cooking

Cook thoroughly and always check the retailer's instructions for cooking times, as this will vary according to the size of the turkey.

Be aware that fan-assisted ovens might cook your turkey more quickly.

To check your turkey is ready, make sure it's steaming hot all the way through. Cut into the thickest part of the turkey – none of the meat should be pink and any juices should run clear.

Cook any stuffing in a separate roasting dish, rather than inside the bird – it will cook more easily and the cooking guidelines for the turkey will be more accurate.

You will find further advice at this link:

Leftovers

Leftovers should be left to cool at room temperature, covered and placed in the fridge or freezer – ideally within one to two hours after being cooked.

Use leftovers from the fridge within two days and, if reheating, do so until steaming hot all the way through. You shouldn't reheat leftovers more than once.

Leftovers can also be frozen and used within one month. Frozen leftovers should be defrosted thoroughly in the fridge and then eaten within 24 hours.

You can also use previously cooked and frozen turkey to make a new meal, such as a turkey curry. This new meal can be frozen too, but make sure you only reheat it once.

More useful links