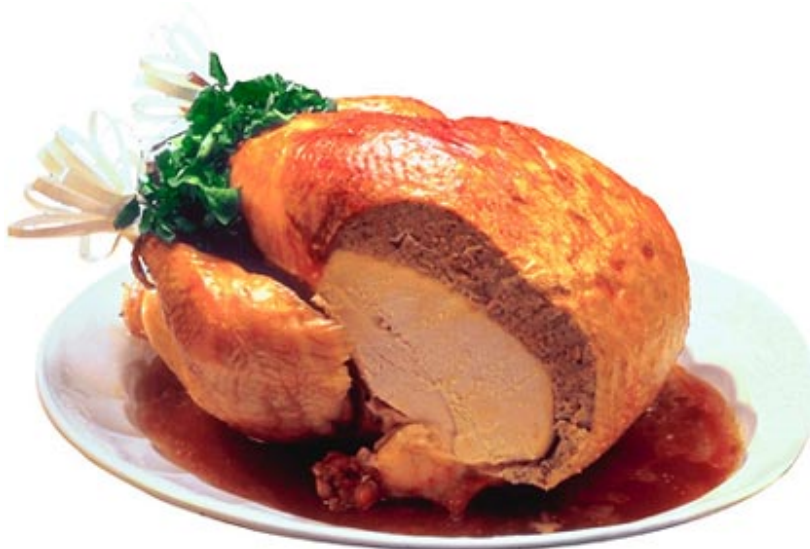


TALKING TURKEY



Christmas is one of the busiest times of the year for the safefood helpline experts. If you're looking for some answers you'll find plenty here.

Frequently Asked Questions Buying and storing the turkey

Q: How should I store the bird at home? How long can I keep a fresh bird in the fridge?

A: If you are buying a fresh bird, buy it as close to Christmas as possible. You should bring it home as quickly as you can and store it on a dish or tray in the bottom shelf of the fridge. A fresh bird should be stored in the fridge for no more than two days before cooking.

Q: How long can I keep a frozen turkey in my freezer?

A: If you buy a frozen bird, put it into your freezer until you're ready to defrost it. It can be kept for up to 6 months in the freezer. After this time the flavour and texture will deteriorate.

Q: Is it safe to put my other shopping in the same bag as the turkey when bringing it home?

A: In the shop, put the fresh or frozen bird in a separate bag. Ideally you should use a cool bag. Keep the turkey away from other cooked and fresh foods to prevent any leakage and cross contamination.

Q: Where should I store raw meats, such as turkey or ham, in my fridge?

A: Store raw meat, including turkey, on the bottom shelf of the fridge. This is to prevent the transfer of germs from raw meat onto cooked or ready-to-eat foods.

Q: How will I fit the bird into my fridge?

A: If drinks are taking up too much room in the fridge how about storing them elsewhere? To cool them before drinking, you can sit the unopened bottles and cans in cold water in a clean container for 30 minutes.

Q: What temperature should my fridge be at?

A: Remember fridges should be kept at temperatures of 5oC or below as measured at the coldest part of your fridge (usually the bottom shelf above the salad bin). Ideally, keep a mercury-free fridge thermometer inside your fridge and check the temperature regularly.

Buying and storing other food

Q: How can I practice food safety when shopping over Christmas?

A: Check use-by dates in shops and pay particular attention to perishable goods such as vacuum-packed smoked salmon or ham, and dairy products. When you're shopping, try to pick up chilled and frozen food last. When packing your groceries, put chilled and frozen food together, ideally in a cool bag, to help keep them cold. Put raw meat and poultry in a separate bag.

Take chilled and frozen food home as quickly as possible and put it in the fridge or freezer straight away. If you leave food at room temperature, in a car or carry it around for a long time, this could raise the temperature enough for harmful bacteria to grow.

Don't buy chilled or frozen food during your lunch hour unless you can keep it in a fridge until you go home.

Once you get home, store food that requires refrigeration quickly after purchase and make sure not to overload your fridge. If there is too much food in your fridge, the air will not be able to flow freely, and this could cause the temperature in your fridge to rise.

Defrosting the bird

Q: Can I cook my bird straight from frozen?

A: If you've bought a frozen bird it must be fully defrosted before cooking. Do not cook from frozen.

Q: How do I defrost the bird properly?

A: The safest way to defrost a bird is in the fridge. Place the bird on the bottom shelf on a plate or tray and make sure it cannot drip onto any other foods.

Q: How long will it take to defrost my turkey?

A: Allow at least 24 hours of defrosting time in the fridge for every 2-2.5kg (approximately 4-5lbs) of food.

Weight (Kg)	Minimum time to defrost
3.5-5.5kg/8-12 lbs	2-3 days
5.5-6.5kg/12-14 lbs	3 - 3 1/2 days
6.5-8kg/14-18 lbs	4 - 4 1/2 days
8-9kg/18-20 lbs	4 1/2 - 5 days
9-11kg/20-24lbs	5-6 days

Q: How do I know if my bird is fully defrosted?

A: The bird is defrosted and ready for cooking when the body is soft the legs can be moved and there are no ice crystals inside the cavity. If you are not going to cook the bird immediately make sure to keep it in the fridge.

Preparing the Bird

Q: Your advice states that you should not wash your bird. Why?

A: Washing raw meat and poultry is likely to spread bacteria in the kitchen through splashes and droplets. It has been shown that washing or soaking whole chickens does not decrease the number of bacteria on the surface of the meat. Consumers who wash poultry and meat are increasing the likelihood of contaminating kitchen surfaces and hands. The best way to kill bacteria commonly found on raw meat and poultry is to cook it properly.

Q: How does it spread germs around your kitchen?

A: Washing the bird under the tap in the sink will create droplets and splashes that can be carried in the air and spread to other parts of the kitchen. They may easily spread to other ready-to-eat foods which you will not be cooking again. This means you will not have the opportunity to kill those germs and if they are in the correct conditions to grow they may make you ill when you eat them. Indeed, research has shown that bacteria like Campylobacter and Salmonella can be spread quite significant distances in the kitchen, contaminating hands, surfaces, utensils, and foods such as ready-to-eat meals. So handle your bird as little as possible by unpacking it directly into the baking tray before placing it straight into the oven. Remember to dispose of any wrapping materials directly into the bin and wash your hands thoroughly.

Q: Is there anything else that I should remember to do?

A: It also is essential to remind everyone to always wash their hands thoroughly after handling raw poultry or its packaging. This means using hot water and soap and ensuring that hands are thoroughly dried afterwards. A quick rinse under the tap is not enough. Correct hand washing involves vigorously rubbing one hand against the other to create a lather.

Q: How can I clean any surfaces that come into contact with raw poultry?

A: Studies have shown that the use of warm water and soap alone are not as effective at removing contamination from surfaces as when used in conjunction with a disinfectant, such as bleach. The surfaces should be first cleaned with soap and hot water, before applying the disinfectant, according to the manufacturer's instructions. It's essential to clean first, as the disinfectant will not be as effective if there are still pieces of food on the surface.

Q: Does this apply to all poultry or just turkey?

A: This applies to all poultry, as Campylobacter is commonly found in all poultry, regardless of the cut or the type of bird.

Cooking the bird

Q: How do I know if my bird is fully cooked and safe to eat?

A: Raw meat may contain bacteria such as Salmonella or Campylobacter, which can make you and your family very ill indeed. Adequate cooking kills these bacteria. Cooking a turkey, chicken or goose can be risky if it isn't done properly. The bird is fully cooked when there is no pink meat left, the juices run clear when the thickest part of the thigh and breast are pierced with a clean fork or skewer and the meat is piping hot all the way through. If you have stuffed your bird, ensure the centre of the stuffing is also piping hot as this is the slowest part to cook in a stuffed turkey. The temperature and time settings you should use for cooking are dependent on your oven, so consult the manufacturer's guidelines.

Q: How long does it take to cook an unstuffed turkey?

A. Use our turkey cooking time calculator and follow our cooking advice to determine the length of time required to cook a safe and delicious turkey in an electric fan assisted oven. Use the following approximate cooking times to cook an unstuffed turkey in other types of ovens preheated to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4:

Weight of turkey	Cooking time
3.5-5.5kg	3 hours- 4 hours 20 minutes
5.5-6.5kg	4 hours 20 minutes - 5 hours
6.5-8kg	5 hours 6 hours 20 minutes
8-9kg	6 hours 20 minutes - 7 hours
9-11kg	7 hours - 8 hours 20 minutes

Always double check that the turkey is properly cooked: it should be piping hot all the way through with no pink meat left and the juices should run clear when the thickest part of the thigh and breast are pierced with a clean fork or skewer.

Q: Why are there differences between the cooking times for electric fan assisted ovens and other types of ovens, and why can I only stuff a turkey cooked in an electric fan assisted oven?

A: The cooking advice on our online calculator and SMS service is based on cooking your turkey in an

electric fan assisted oven only. It is essential that you carefully follow these cooking times and directions to ensure a safe and delicious turkey. This is because our research showed that electric fan assisted ovens are typically more efficient at cooking turkeys than other types of oven, such as gas ovens. This has allowed safe cooking conditions for stuffed turkeys to be defined. Using these cooking times with other types of ovens (e.g. gas ovens, conventional ovens) may not result in your turkey being fully cooked. If you do not have a fan assisted oven then we recommend that you do not stuff your turkey. With these other ovens, the safest way to cook your stuffing is on a roasting dish or tray separate from the turkey. Our research showed that stuffed turkeys cook differently in other types of ovens and may not be fully cooked and safe if cooking advice for fan assisted ovens is used.

Q: If my bird is stuffed do I need to give it extra time?

A: Stuffing a turkey can significantly increase the cooking time. A stuffed 6.5kg turkey will take one hour longer to cook in an electric fan assisted oven than an unstuffed turkey of the same weight. Note: see the above question for an explanation as to why we only recommend cooking a stuffed turkey in an electric fan assisted oven

Turkey cooking calculator

Tip: To make sure the bird is cooked thoroughly just pierce the thickest part of the breast and drumstick i.e. leg and check that the juices run clear, there is no pink meat left, and it is piping hot throughout.

Q: I have a boned and rolled turkey joint - Do I need to give this more or less time to cook?

A: For turkey that has been boned and rolled, you should follow the instructions on the label for those joints that are pre-packed.

If your butcher is preparing the joint for you, ensure that you know the weight of the joint when you are buying it. Turkey that is boned and rolled should be cooked for 35 minutes per 450 grams (1 pound) plus 35 extra minutes at 180°C / 350oF / Gas Mark 4 or 5.

Remember to check that the boned and rolled joint is cooked at the end of the cooking period by ensuring it is piping hot all the way through, there is no pink meat left and the juices run clear when the thickest part of the joint is pierced with a skewer.

Q: Can I use the same time and temperature guidelines for cooking duck or goose for Christmas?

A: Other birds, such as goose and duck, need different cooking times to those of turkey. The oven should always be hotter for duck and goose to melt the fat under the skin. They also need regular basting. In an oven at 220oC/425oF/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 200oC/400oF/Gas Mark 6. 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 by making sure that there is no pink meat left, it is piping hot all the way through and until the juices run clear when the thickest part of the meat is pierced with a clean fork or skewer.

Stuffing the bird

Q: How do I stuff the bird properly?

A: New research from *safe food* demonstrated that it is possible to cook a safe and delicious stuffed turkey using an electric fan assisted oven only. Keep the following points in mind when cooking a stuffed turkey:

- A stuffed turkey will take longer to cook than an unstuffed turkey
- Prepare stuffing just before cooking
- Do not overstuff the bird. The stuffing (weighing no more than 10% of the weight of the bird) should be loosely packed in the body cavity
- Cook the stuffed turkey in an electric fan assisted oven preheated to 180°C
- Follow the cooking time guidelines and instructions found here
- Ensure the centre of the stuffing is piping hot after cooking as this is the slowest part to cook in a stuffed turkey

Based on our research, we know the cooking time guidelines only apply to electric fan assisted ovens. The same times applied to other oven types will not result in a properly cooked turkey, whether stuffed or not. Therefore, we recommend cooking stuffing outside the turkey for other oven types and following conventional cooking advice for turkey cooking times.

Leftovers

Q: When I have leftovers what should I do with them?

A: Turkey that is left over should be taken off the bone, cut into smaller portions that will allow for quicker cooling, placed in a shallow dish, covered and refrigerated within 2 hours. Remember to use clean dishes and utensils for cooked food.

Q: How long can I keep leftovers in fridge?

A: Once refrigerated the food should be eaten within 3 days.

Q: Where should I store the leftover turkey and ham in my fridge?

A: Store your leftover turkey or ham above and well away from any raw meat. This is to prevent any harmful bacteria spreading from raw food to cooked food.

Q: What temperature should my fridge be at?

A: Aim to keep the coldest part of your fridge (usually the bottom shelf above the salad bin) at 5°C or below. Keep a mercury-free fridge thermometer inside your fridge and check it regularly.

Q: What temperature should my freezer be at?

A: Keeping your freezer at or below -18°C will help maintain the quality of frozen foods. In order to ensure that the temperature inside your freezer does not get too warm, don't put food in the freezer when it's still hot. Cool it as quickly as possible (within two hours), cover and put in the freezer. Your freezer should be able to freeze food and keep it frozen over a period of months. Remember to keep the freezer door closed and only open it when necessary.

Q: When I want to use the leftovers - is it safe to reheat them?

A: When reheating leftovers always reheat them until they are piping hot all the way through. Soups, sauces and gravies should be brought to a rolling boil. You should NEVER reheat leftovers more than once.

Q: How do I freeze my leftovers?

A: When freezing leftover food, don't put large amounts of warm or hot food directly into the freezer, first allow the food to cool, cover it and put it in the freezer within 2 hours.

Q: I have leftover cooked turkey and I put into my freezer. When I defrost this and reheat it - can I freeze it again if I don't use it all?

A: No - any cooked food which you freeze and then defrost can not be refrozen. When freezing your cooked turkey try to divide it into portions that you can take out and use all at once.

Q: Can I freeze cooked fish?

A: Yes both cooked meat and cooked fish can be frozen.

Q: How long can I keep food in my freezer?

A: We recommend that you do not keep any food in your freezer for longer than 6 months.

Q: Can I freeze smoked salmon?

A: Yes you can freeze smoked salmon. Just remember to freeze it before it has reached its 'use by' date as foods that have reached their 'use by' date may not be safe to eat.

Q: What do I do with leftover gravy or soups?

A: Gravy, sauces and soups that are left over should be stored in the fridge and kept no longer than 3 days. Bring them to a rolling boil before serving.

Parties

Q: Is it safe to leave food out at room temperature for long periods?

A: If you are hosting a party or having a buffet, don't leave food out at room temperature for more than 2 hours. Bacteria can double every 20 minutes at room temperature so proper control of storage temperature is essential