United States Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service
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Food Safety Information

Turkey Basics: Safe Cooking

A food thermometer should be used to ensure a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F has been reached to destroy bacteria and prevent foodborne illness.

Many variables can affect the roasting time of a whole turkey:

- A partially frozen turkey requires longer cooking.
- A stuffed turkey takes longer to cook.
- The oven may heat food unevenly.
- Temperature of the oven may be inaccurate.
- Dark roasting pans cook faster than shiny metals.
- The depth and size of the pan can reduce heat circulation to all areas of the turkey.
- The use of a foil tent for the entire time can slow cooking.
- Use of the roasting pan's lid speeds cooking.
- An oven cooking bag can accelerate cooking time.
- The rack position can have an affect on even cooking and heat circulation.
- A turkey or its pan may be too large for the oven, thus blocking heat circulation.

ROASTING INSTRUCTIONS

1. Set the oven temperature no lower than 325 °F. Preheating is not necessary.

2. Be sure the turkey is completely thawed. Times are based on fresh or thawed birds at a refrigerator temperature of 40 °F or below.

3. Place turkey breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan 2 to 2 1/2 inches deep.

Optional steps:

- Tuck wing tips back under shoulders of bird (called "akimbo").
- Add one-half cup water to the bottom of the pan.
- In the beginning, a tent of aluminum foil may be placed loosely over the breast of the turkey for the first 1 to 1 1/2 hours, then removed for browning. Or, a tent of foil may be placed over the turkey after the turkey has reached the desired golden brown color.

4. For optimum safety, cook stuffing in a casserole. If stuffing your turkey, mix ingredients just before stuffing it; stuff loosely. Additional time is required for the turkey and stuffing to reach a safe minimum internal temperature (see chart).

5. For safety and doneness, the internal temperature should be checked with a food thermometer.

The temperature of the turkey and the center of the stuffing must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165 °F. Check the temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast.

6. Let the bird stand 20 minutes before removing stuffing and carving.

APPROXIMATE COOKING TIMES (325 °F oven temperature)

UNSTUFFED (time in hours)

4 to 6 lb breast	1 1/2 to 2 1/4
6 to 8 lb breast	2 1/4 to 3 1/4
8 to 12 lbs	2 3/4 to 3
12 to 14 lbs	3 to 3 3/4
14 to 18 lbs	3 3/4 to 4 1/4
18 to 20 lbs	4 1/4 to 4 1/2
20 to 24 lbs	4 1/2 to 5

STUFFED (time in hours)

8 to 12 lbs	3 to 3 1/2
12 to 14 lbs	3 1/2 to 4
14 to 18 lbs	4 to 4 1/4
18 to 20 lbs	4 1/4 to 4 3/4
20 to 24 lbs	4 3/4 to 5 1/4

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Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline

1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)

Year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.

Send E-mail questions to **MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov**.

AskKaren.gov

For automated responses via the Internet 24 hours a day and a live chat during Hotline hours.

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