

Wellness Articles

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Turkey tips: safety at every step

'Tis the season for turkey dinners. From grocery store to leftovers, safe food handling practices are key to preventing the spread of harmful bacteria and keeping your feast free of foodborne illness.

Sound like a lot to digest? With these essential turkey tips, we're making it easy to serve up safely.

At the Grocery Store:

- Double check the "best before" date to ensure expiration date has not passed.
- Place the turkey at the bottom of the cart away from other food
- Ask for the turkey to be bagged separately from all other food
- Keep turkey separate from other bags when transporting from store to home

Pre-cooking storage:

- Freeze your turkey immediately after returning home from the grocery store if you will be cooking it more than three days after bringing it home.
- Refrigerate your turkey immediately upon arriving home from the grocery store if you will be cooking it within three days.
- Prevent raw turkey or turkey juices from contaminating other items in your fridge or freezer by ensuring it is stored in a clean plastic container or plastic bag that will hold in any leaking juices and placing the turkey on a platter to catch any leaking juices. Always place the turkey on the bottom shelf of the fridge or freezer.

Thawing:

- Always thaw your turkey in the fridge or by fully immersing it in a sink of cold water. If thawing in the sink, keep the turkey in its original plastic wrap and change the water every 30 minutes to ensure the surface of the turkey remains cold.
- Do not thaw turkey at room temperature – it is not safe and could result in the growth of dangerous bacteria.
- Cook turkey immediately after it has thawed.

Cooking:

- Turkey must be cooked thoroughly, in the oven, until the meat reaches a minimum internal temperature of 85 degrees centigrade or 185 degrees farenheight.
- To ensure the turkey is properly cooked, always use a meat thermometer according to the manufacturer's instructions. Insert the thermometer into the fleshiest part of the thigh, ensuring it is not touching any bones.
- Never slowcook a turkey
- Prepare and cook stuffing separately from the turkey.

Serving:

- Serve the turkey within 30 minutes of removing from the oven.
- Keep hot food hot: hot foods should be kept at a temperature of at least 60 degrees centigrade or 140 degrees farenheight.
- Keep cold food cold: cold foods should be kept at a temperature of 4 degrees celcius or 40 degrees farenheight or lower.
- Do not serve food that has been sitting at room temperature for more than two hours.

Leftovers:

- Refrigerate all leftovers within two hours of serving.
- Leftover meat, stuffing or gravy should be eaten within two or three days of cooking. Any food that will not be consumed within three days should be immediately frozen after cooking.