

Buying the Turkey

Uncooked turkey skin is white or pale cream in color. The color under the skin can range from pink to bluish depending on the amount of subcutaneous fat.

- **Fresh Unstuffed Turkey:**
 - Must be used or frozen in 1 to 2 days
- **Fresh Stuffed Turkey:**
 - Not recommended
 - It is difficult to heat the center of the stuffing to a high enough temperature to kill bacteria
- **Frozen Stuffed Turkey:**
 - SHOULD NOT BE THAWED
 - It should be unwrapped and placed in the oven while still frozen

Defrosting the Turkey

- **Never defrost the turkey on a countertop**
 - This increases the chance of bacterial growth
- **Refrigerator method: This is the safest way**
 - It will take one day thawing time for every 5–pounds of turkey. For example: a 15–pound turkey will take 3–days to thaw.
 - The refrigerator must be set at 40 degrees F. or colder.
 - **Cold water method:**
 - Keep the turkey wrapped in a waterproof wrap or it will absorb the water.
 - The turkey needs to be completely submerged in cold water.
 - Change the water every 30 minutes to keep it cold.
 - It will take 30 minutes per pound to defrost. For example: a 15 pound turkey will take 7 ½ hours to thaw.
 - Cook the turkey immediately.
- **Microwave method**
 - Follow the microwave manufacturers' instructions.
 - Microwave defrosting makes for “hot spots” in the turkey that will be partially cooked.
 - The turkey needs to be cooked immediately.

Stuffing

- **Cooking a stuffed turkey carries a higher risk of food-borne illness** than cooking an unstuffed turkey.
 - It is safer to cook the stuffing separately in a casserole dish

- **Mix up the stuffing just before you stuff the turkey**
 - Dry and wet ingredients can be mixed separately the night before
 - They must be refrigerated immediately
 - Combine them just before stuffing the turkey
- **If sausage or oysters are used in the stuffing they must be cooked first**
- **Do not pack the stuffing tightly in the bird**
 - When packed tightly, the inside does not cook hot enough to kill bacteria
- **Do not cook a stuffed turkey in a microwave**
 - It does not get hot enough to kill bacteria

Cooking Safety

- **Use a meat thermometer**
 - Do not roast a turkey in an oven below 325 degrees F—it will start to grow bacteria.
 - Do not rely on the pop up button, or built-in thermometer, in the turkey—they are unreliable.
- **To be considered safe the turkey must be cooked until the temperature reaches 165 degrees F**
 - Measure at the innermost section of the thigh
- **The CENTER of the stuffing must reach 165 degrees F**
 - If the turkey is 165 degrees F and the stuffing is not 165 degrees F then you must continue to cook the turkey until the stuffing is safe.
- **It is safe to cook a frozen turkey, it will just take longer**
- **Never partially cook a turkey and let it cool below 140 degrees F**
 - If this has happens, DO NOT finish cooking it, it will not be safe to eat
- **Never reheat a whole turkey**
- **Pink meat does not mean the turkey is unsafe to eat.** Fully cooked poultry that has reached 180 degrees can still be pink—and edible. There are a lot of reasons turkey meat will remain pink when it is completely cooked. Some of them are:
 - The turkey is commercially smoked
 - The turkey is very young
 - The turkey was a 'free range turkey' and has more muscle tissue
 - Grilling or smoking the turkey outdoors—even when the meat is well done
- **What to do if the sack containing the giblets is cooked inside the turkey?**
 - If the giblets are in a paper sack and they are cooked inside the turkey, they can be eaten.
 - If the giblets are in a plastic bag and the bag is melted, don't use the giblets.
 - If the plastic giblet bag is melted up against a section of the turkey, don't use the giblets and cut out the section of turkey the plastic melted onto, then use the rest of the turkey.

Leftovers

- **Do NOT leave a turkey out all day at room temperature to snack on**
- **Do not refrigerate the whole turkey**
 - Remove the meat within two hours of roasting
 - Refrigerate it in SHALLOW CONTAINERS to allow the meat to cool quickly
- **Refrigerate the turkey meat, stuffing, and gravy separately**
 - Leftover turkey will keep 3-4 days in the refrigerator
 - Stuffing and gravy will keep 1-2 days in refrigerator
 - Bring the leftover gravy to a rolling boil before serving it
 - Other cooked dishes are expected to keep 3-4 days in the refrigerator

Resources

- **Butterball Turkey Talkline: 1-800-BUTTERBALL or 1-800-288-8372**
 - You can speak to someone Monday to Friday, 8am to 8pm CST
 - Pre-recorded messages of FAQs are available at all times
- **Jennie-O Holiday Helpline: 1-800-TURKEYS or 1-800-887-2255**
 - Answers to your turkey preparation questions, 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week, November 1 through January 1
 - <http://www.jennie-o.com>
- **The USDA Meat / Poultry Hotline: 1-800-535-4555**
 - Open from 10am to 4pm EST
 - There is a 24 hour tape library that can be accessed via a touch-tone phone that answers most questions
 - US Department of Agriculture: <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome>
 - Food Safety and Inspection Service: <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/>
- **Other websites**
 - McCormick Spices: www.mccormick.com
 - Norbest Turkey: www.norbest.com
 - National Turkey Federation: www.turkeyfed.org
 - StarChefs™ online magazine (serving the foodservice industry): www.starchefs.com
 - Cook's Illustrated magazine: www.turkeyhelp.com

Expert Poison Information 24/7: 1-800-222-1222