

Cooking Your HOLIDAY MEAL



consumer *brief*

The holiday season brings families together around the table, sharing good times and great food. But holiday joy can turn to sadness if a loved one becomes ill from undercooked poultry. Whatever you bake, braise, boil, fry or fricassee, whether it's turkey, duck, chicken, hen or goose, make sure you cook it long enough to kill all harmful bacteria. A few simple steps when preparing your meal can make for a healthier and happier holiday.

STORING AND THAWING YOUR BIRD

- Frozen poultry should stay in the freezer until you are ready to cook it.
- To prevent bacteria from spreading, always keep your hands clean and use hot, soapy water to wash everything that comes in contact with the raw meat.
- Fresh poultry can be kept in the refrigerator for up to two days.
- Keep the bird in its original wrapper until you are ready to prepare it.

THERE ARE THREE WAYS TO SAFELY THAW FROZEN POULTRY:

Refrigerator Method

The first is the refrigerator method. If you have enough time, defrost the bird in the refrigerator. It defrosts at a rate of five pounds per day. When using this method, it is important to place the bird on a dish so the juices don't drip in the refrigerator or contaminate other food.

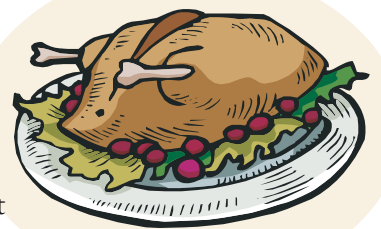
Cold Water Method

If you don't have enough time to thaw your bird in the refrigerator, you can use the cold water method. The wrapped bird should be placed in the sink and covered

with cold water. The water should be changed every half hour. It will take approximately one half hour per pound to thaw.

Microwave Method

If you are very limited with time, the other method is to use your microwave. It is important that you check the manufacturer's instructions for the size bird that will fit in your microwave, the minutes per pound, and the power level. Remove the wrapping as soon as it becomes loose. If you use the microwave, remember you must cook the bird immediately after thawing.



PREPARING AND STUFFING

After the bird has thawed, remove the neck and giblets and thoroughly wash the inside and outside of the bird with cold water. Drain and pat dry with paper towels. If you are cooking the stuffing inside the bird, put it in the bird just before it goes into the oven. Stuff it loosely so the stuffing will heat to a safe temperature. When the bird is done, take the stuffing out immediately. Set the oven no lower than 325 degrees.

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WHEN IS THE BIRD DONE?

If you are cooking a turkey breast, the meat should reach 170 degrees. If you are cooking a whole turkey, the dark meat should reach 180 degrees. In either case, the stuffing should reach 165 degrees. The juices should also run clear. If they are pink, the bird is not done. Some birds have a pop-up timer, but they can either pop prematurely or not pop at all.

STORING LEFTOVERS SAFELY

Refrigerate or freeze any leftovers within two hours of taking them out of the oven. Take the meat off the bones and refrigerate it in shallow covered dishes so it will cool to a safe temperature quickly.

The stuffing and poultry should be used within three to four days, and the gravy in two days if refrigerated.

If you have any questions call the United States Department of Agriculture's Meat and Poultry hotline at 1-800-535-4555.

HOW TO PREVENT FOOD POISONING

The United States Department of Agriculture Food and Safety Service recommends the following to prevent food poisoning:

- Keep a neat, clean kitchen. Wash your hands in warm soapy water before handling food.
- Cook food thoroughly until it's done.
- Even during a meal, food should never stay out of the refrigerator more than two hours.
- Refrigerate leftovers as soon as a meal is over.
- When you go grocery shopping, go home immediately, and put food like meat, milk, eggs and other perishable on the refrigerator.

KEEP YOUR FAMILY HEALTHY. KNOW HOW LONG FOOD WILL LAST ON THE REFRIGERATOR.

FROZEN FOOD COMPARTMENT:

pork roast	4-8 months
steak.....	6-12 months
beef roast	6-12 months
whole chicken	12 months
hamburger	3-4 months
TV dinners	expiration date
corn	8 months
meat & vegetable casserole	2-3 months

REFRIGERATOR SHELVES:

milk	expiration date
eggs	expiration date
butter	expiration date
fresh hamburger	1-2 days
chicken parts	1-2 days
bacon	one week
sour cream	2-4 weeks
deli lunch meat, unopened	2 weeks
deli lunch meat, opened	1 week
wipped cream/custard pies	2-3 days
fish fresh	1-2 days
cooked meat and vegetable casserole..	3-4 days

Watch the date on the package! If there is a "use -by" date on the container, follow it. Other wise, use these storage times.

Keep the door shut so the refrigerator can keep everything cold. Defrost the refrigerator when ice builds up on the freezer unit.



Have a happy holiday
and remember to make sure
your goose is cooked!

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