

## Talking Turkey: Answers to Commonly Asked Questions

### When is the turkey done?

*When the temperature reaches 74°C (165°F)!*

No matter how long your turkey is cooking in the oven, the only way to be sure it's properly cooked is to take the temperature. An inaccurate oven thermostat or incomplete thawing could cause the turkey to be undercooked. The best way to get an accurate temperature reading is to use a probe thermometer. *If you don't have one – buy one!* Insert a probe thermometer into the innermost part of the thigh or largest part of the breast without touching the bone. When the meat and stuffing reach 74°C (165°F), the turkey is done.



*The internal temperature of the meat and stuffing should be at least 74°C (165°F) – be sure to use your probe thermometer!*

Even if parts of the turkey look slightly pink, it might be done. The best way to tell the meat is cooked is to take the temperature with your thermometer.

### What do you do with leftover turkey, stuffing and gravy?

After the turkey is removed from the oven the temperature will begin to drop. **Leftover turkey, stuffing and side dishes should be refrigerated within 2 hours after the meal is served.** This is important because although some bacteria is killed by cooking, bacterial spores not destroyed by cooking can germinate, start to grow and release toxins into the leftovers that can make you sick - even if the food is reheated later.

You can also make soup or stock from the leftover turkey carcass. This is often done the day after the turkey is cooked. **Remember the carcass, just like the other leftovers, should be refrigerated as soon as possible, ideally within 2 hours after the meal.**

### What other food safety recommendations are important?

You may have heard the slogan “Cook”, “Clean”, “Chill”, “Separate”?

- Chill foods down to refrigerator temperatures of 4°C (40°F)
- Reheat turkey and leftovers to a minimum of 74°C (165°F).

Cleaning and separating are also important. Raw turkey juices have bacteria that can contaminate other foods in the kitchen. When handling the turkey, ensure that other foods are kept separate from the raw turkey, and from any surfaces that the raw turkey touches.

*Clean and disinfect any surfaces that the turkey touches by washing with hot soapy water, then disinfecting with a diluted solution of bleach (one teaspoon, or 5 ml per litre).*

[Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education](#) (CPCFSE)



### Can you cook frozen turkeys?

**Yes.** If you purchase frozen pre-stuffed or un-stuffed turkeys, you can cook from frozen – just follow the manufacturer's recommendations – generally allow for 50% longer than recommended roasting times for a thawed bird.

*Before cooking a frozen turkey remove anything stored in the bird's cavities, such as the neck or giblets.*

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**BC Centre for Disease Control**  
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

For further information please contact Food Protection Services at 604.707.2440 or email [fpinfo@bccdc.ca](mailto:fpinfo@bccdc.ca)

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## Buying Recommendations

<b>Frozen</b>	buy anytime and thaw 1 to 6 days prior to cooking
<b>Fresh</b>	buy 1 to 2 days before cooking and refrigerate
<b>Pre-stuffed frozen</b>	buy anytime and cook from frozen as per cooking instructions
<b>Pre-stuffed fresh</b>	not recommended because home refrigerators may not keep the stuffing below 4°C

## Thawing Recommendations

Weight (pounds)	Weight (kilograms)	Thaw In Refrigerator (days)	Thaw In Cold Water (hours)	In Microwave
4 - 12	3 - 5½	1 - 3	2 - 6	Not recommended
12 - 16	5½ - 7	3 - 4	6 - 8	
16 - 20	7 - 9	4 - 5	8 - 10	
20 - 24	9 - 11	4 - 6	10 - 12	

## Roasting Recommendations

The MINIMUM temperature for cooking turkey is 163°C (325°F)– cook the turkey faster at higher temperatures of 180°C (350°F) or 190°C (375°F).

Weight (pounds)	Weight (kilograms)	Stuffed (hours)	Unstuffed (hours)
8 - 12	3 - 5½	3 - 3½	2¾ - 3
12 - 14	5½ - 6½	3½ - 4	3 - 3¾
14 - 18	6½ - 8	4 - 4¾	3¾ - 4¼
18 - 20	8 - 9	4¾ - 4¾	4¼ - 4½
20 - 24	9 - 11	4¾ - 5¼	4½ - 5

**Lower cooking temperatures for longer times, such as overnight at 121°C (250°F), are not recommended because the meat may not heat fast enough to stop bacteria from growing.**

## Brining Recommendations

Brining adds flavour and moisture to your turkey meat. Only brine natural turkey with no additives (e.g. Butterballs).

**USE FOOD-GRADE SALT**  
– road salt and sea-water salt are not acceptable sources for use in brines.

**Liquid brining** is when a whole bird is soaked in salted water for 6 to 24 hours, usually the day before roasting. Sweeteners - such as sugar, molasses, honey, or corn syrup - also add flavour and improve browning. Fresh spices and other ingredients may also be added – find your own favourite recipe! Use a brining bag, food grade plastic or metal container large enough to hold the turkey while submerged in brine. **Make sure you have enough room to fit this container in your refrigerator.** Submerge the turkey in the solution, seal bag or cover the container, and set the turkey in the refrigerator. **Make your brine a day ahead and cool it completely before submerging the turkey in it.**

To **dry brine** a turkey, apply salt (and desired spices) directly to the meat as a rub; try to get the dry brine under the skin where possible. As the dry brine mixes with moisture from the turkey, it will work its way under the skin and throughout the bird. Double bag your turkey so juices released during the dry brine process don't contaminate your refrigerator.

**To rinse or not to rinse your turkey before cooking:** If you're not brining, you can skip rinsing altogether and cook the turkey as is comes out of the packaging. If you do rinse, be careful that juices from the raw bird don't contaminate other surfaces in your kitchen – bacteria in the juices can easily be spread this way. After brining, the turkey needs to be thoroughly rinsed to remove any excess salt from the surface prior to cooking. You probably won't need to add any additional salt to your stuffing or gravy, though! Thoroughly clean all surfaces that have come into contact with any raw juices.

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## Deep Frying Recommendations

A whole turkey can be successfully cooked by the deep fat frying method however this is not recommended due to burn risks. The turkey should be **completely thawed, not stuffed** and be **12 pounds or less in size**.

### Tips for deep-frying:

- Use a pot big enough to hold the turkey
- You should pre-measure how much oil you need using water. Put the turkey in the pot, cover with water, remove the turkey then measure the amount of water used
- oil should cover the turkey by 1 to 2 inches
- Select a safe location outdoors

Heat the cooking oil to 177°C (350°F), then lower the turkey into the hot oil. Monitor the temperature of the oil with a thermometer constantly during cooking. **Never leave the hot oil unattended. Allow approximately 7 to 11 minutes per kilogram (3 to 5 minutes per pound) cooking time.**

Remove turkey from the oil before checking the temperature with a food thermometer. If the turkey is not cooked to **74°C (165°F)**, immediately place the turkey back into the hot oil for additional cooking. **Hot oil can cause burns – use caution!**

Allow the used oil to cool completely before pouring it into containers for refrigerator storage. The oil can be reused if it is strained, covered, and used within a month.

**REMINDER: always make sure whole turkeys reach 74°C (165°F) as measured in the innermost part of the thigh and the thickest part of the breast.**

## Other Ways to Cook Turkey

Method	Estimated Cooking Time	Notes
Electric Roaster Oven	Generally same times as for oven roasting.	Minimum oven temp 163°C (325°F). Check appliance manual.
Grilling: Covered Charcoal Grill or Covered Gas Grill	30 to 40 min/kg 15 to 18 min/lb <b>DO NOT STUFF</b>	Air in grill must maintain 107-149°C (225-300°F); use drip pan.
Smoking a Turkey	45 to 60 min/kg 20 to 30 min/lb <b>DO NOT STUFF</b>	Air in smoker must maintain 107-149°C (225-300°F); use drip pan.
Deep Fat Frying	7 to 11 min/kg 3 to 5 min/lb <b>DO NOT STUFF</b>	Oil must maintain 177°C (350°F).
Cooking Turkey Frozen	Add 50% additional cooking time per chart.	Do not use oven cooking bag; remove giblets during cooking.
Microwaving a Turkey	20 to 22 min/kg or 9 to 10 min/lb on medium (50%) power. <b>DO NOT STUFF</b>	Use oven cooking bag. Rotate during cooking.
Pressure Cooker	Times vary by altitude.	Follow manufacturers' directions.
Slow Cooker	Times vary	Follow manufacturers' directions. Use only thawed parts. Keep lid in place.

## References

[Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education \(CPCFSE\)](#)

[Turkey Farmers of Canada](#)

[US Dept of Agriculture, Food Safety and Inspection Service \(USDA FSIS\)](#)

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