



5 Mistakes to Avoid When Preparing Your Holiday Turkey

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Introduction

Are you roasting a whole turkey for the first time this year? Or perhaps you've done this many times before, but you want a quick food safety refresher to brush up on the basics? Whether you are a newbie or a veteran, there are some steps that are essential to assure that your turkey is not only delicious and beautiful, but safe to eat.



A plate with turkey and sides

Mistake 1 – Improper thawing of frozen bird

Most of us buy our turkey frozen. Because turkeys are frozen with the neck and giblets packaged inside the turkey, it is necessary to defrost it before cooking. Three safe ways are available to defrost the bird.

- In the refrigerator on a tray or platter in the original wrap. The disadvantage of this method is that it takes a long time. An 8 to 12 pound bird takes about 1 to 3 days to thaw.
- Thaw in cold water in a watertight wrapper surrounded by cold water. The water must be changed every 30 minutes to assure that the surface of the bird

stays cold (or you can place the container in the refrigerator). It will take only about 2 to 6 hours to defrost an 8 to 12 pound bird compared to days in the refrigerator.

- In the microwave, but check with manufacturer's suggestions for size of turkey, power level, and time per pound. Cook immediately after defrosting.

Mistake 2 – Spreading bacteria around when washing the bird

Although it is not necessary, most people wash the turkey before cooking, especially the cavity. Care must be taken not to contaminate the surrounding sink and counter. Sanitize the area by washing in hot soapy water then wiping or spraying with a freshly made solution of sanitizer (1 tablespoon unscented chlorine bleach in gallon of cold water) and allowing to air dry.

Mistake 3 – Cooking at too low temperature

Once cooking begins, do not interrupt the cooking process. Bacteria grow fastest between 41°F and 135°F. When the cooking process is interrupted, the temperature may be just perfect for rapid growth of harmful bacteria.

Mistake 4 – Not taking the internal temperature of the bird

The temperature must reach 165°F or higher (this also goes for stuffing cooked either in the bird or outside the bird). The only safe way to assure that the bird is adequately cooked to kill harmful bacteria is to take the internal temperature in the thickest part of

the breast and the innermost part of the thigh. Cooking time, color of the bird, or a pop up gauge can be used as a guide for doneness, but the only sure way is to measure the temperature with a meat thermometer.

Mistake 5 – Letting the turkey sit at room temperature too long after cooking

Refrigerate leftover turkey (and all of the trimmings) within 2 hours. Cut the turkey into small pieces to assure that it cools rapidly. Place stuffing and gravy in shallow containers. If the food is left at room temperature for longer than 2 hours, discard it.

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