

Advice on cooking a turkey safely

It's important to prepare and cook your festive food safely. Every year people suffer food poisoning in December as a result of campylobacter bacteria, which is found in turkey and chicken.

Avoiding food poisoning

It's important that you handle, prepare and cook your turkey properly in order to kill campylobacter bacteria.

Christmas is a time when people often cook a bigger bird than they usually do. Nobody wants to be ill over the festive period especially with [food poisoning](#), which can have many unpleasant symptoms, such as:

- nausea
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- abdominal cramps

Top turkey tips

Remember these top tips for cooking your turkey.

Keep meat in fridge

Keep your fresh turkey and other raw poultry meat in the fridge until it's ready to use.

Make space in the fridge, try not to pack food too tightly as the cold air needs to circulate to keep all your food cool.

Keep raw foods separate from other ready-to-eat foods by putting raw meat in a covered container and placing on the bottom of the fridge to avoid cross-contamination.

Your fridge temperature should be running between 0 and 5°C.

Defrosting a frozen turkey

The time it takes to defrost a frozen turkey varies, so check the instructions on the packaging. For example, a typical large turkey weighing six to seven kg could take as much as four days to fully defrost in the fridge.

Do not defrost your turkey at room temperature.

When defrosting, leave it in the packaging (or cover and put it in a container to hold any thawing juices), then place at the bottom of the fridge

to avoid cross-contamination.

Defrost fully, otherwise your turkey may not cook evenly and harmful bacteria could survive the cooking process.

Some turkeys can be cooked from frozen if the manufacturer's instructions say so. If yours is one of these, always follow the manufacturer's advice.

Don't wash your turkey

Don't wash your turkey, or any other poultry or meat.

Washing poultry can spread germs by splashing onto cooking utensils, kitchen tops and anything else within reach – including you.

Cooking thoroughly will kill any bacteria, including campylobacter.

Cooking

Cook thoroughly and always check the retailer's instructions for cooking times, as this will vary according to the size of the turkey.

Be aware that fan-assisted ovens might cook your turkey more quickly.

To check your turkey is ready, make sure it's steaming hot all the way through. Cut into the thickest part of the turkey – none of the meat should be pink and any juices should run clear.

Cook any stuffing in a separate roasting dish, rather than inside the bird – it will cook more easily and the cooking guidelines for the turkey will be more accurate.

You will find further advice at this link:

Leftovers

Leftovers should be left to cool at room temperature, covered and placed in the fridge or freezer – ideally within one to two hours after being cooked.

Use leftovers from the fridge within two days and, if reheating, do so until steaming hot all the way through. You shouldn't reheat leftovers more than once.

Leftovers can also be frozen and used within one month. Frozen leftovers should be defrosted thoroughly in the fridge and then eaten within 24 hours.

You can also use previously cooked and frozen turkey to make a new meal, such as a turkey curry. This new meal can be frozen too, but make sure you only reheat it once.

More useful links

[Look after your mental health over the holidays](#)

Look after your mental health and that of your loved ones over the holiday period. Christmas is traditionally viewed as a time of celebration and happiness, but unfortunately for some it can also be stressful and lonely.

Tips on dealing with stress

Many of us will be looking forward to the Christmas holidays so that we can spend time with our family and friends.

However, this time of the year also brings stress, with people worrying about money, remembering the loss of a loved one, or feeling lonely.

Practical tips on dealing with stress over the festive season include:

- make time for family and friends
- go for a walk or run, cycle, play a game, garden or dance – exercising makes you feel good
- stop, pause, or take a moment to look around you
- don't be afraid to try something new, rediscover an old hobby or set yourself a new challenge over the holidays
- don't be afraid to give and accept support – being available for others if they need support should encourage them to be there for you too

People often use [alcohol](#) to relax, but instead of helping us to cope it can make things worse. If you choose to drink, know your limits and avoid excessive or binge drinking.

You can find out more about mental health and available services at this [link](#):

Look out for the welfare of others

As well as our own, we should also look out for family members, friends and neighbours and be mindful of their mental health.

It's important to look out for behaviour that could show that someone is under pressure and really needs help.

If you're worried or concerned about someone else, talk to them. Ask them how

they are feeling and if there is anything you can do to help them.

Distress or despair

If you think someone might be in need of immediate help, find out what to do at this link:

If you or someone you know is in distress or despair, call [Lifeline](#) on:

The helpline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

More useful links

[Enjoying Christmas with a loved one who has dementia](#)

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Christmas can pose challenges for people living with dementia, and those close to them. Here are some tips to help everyone enjoy the festive season.

Involve your loved one

In the lead up to the Christmas period, involve your loved one who has [dementia](#).

Things you could do include:

- discuss with them what they would like to do over the Christmas period – do they want to visit friends or would they like friends to visit them in their own home
- if family and friends cannot come home for Christmas, consider setting up face time or video calls, this is a fabulous way of people keeping in touch
- if you haven't done so already, involve them in putting up the Christmas tree and decorations – it provides a perfect opportunity for them to reminisce about their early memories of Christmas and the enjoyable times with friends and family in years gone by
- if they enjoyed shopping but are less mobile, encourage [online shopping](#), and give them independence over choosing presents for their loved ones
- arrange for them to go to their local church and/ or carol service over the festive period

- if they like to be involved in the preparation of food, continue this tradition so that it makes them feel that they have an active role to play and they don't feel excluded

Advice for carers

If you are a carer:

- [share the caring duties](#), if family members are home over the Christmas period ask them to help out with the caring role
- devise a rota for caring duties and have some back-up plans in case agreed arrangements don't fall into place (grandchildren, friends and neighbours may also wish to be part of a 'one-off' rota for caring or befriending, this can allow you to have a night out or a day's shopping in the run-up to Christmas)
- you need to spend precious time with your own family, such as husband, wife, partner, children and grandchildren – you should not feel guilty about someone else doing your caring duties
- don't forget your own health and wellbeing – plan in advance what you wish to do if you get a break at Christmas from your caring duties

Dementia

You can find information about the signs of dementia, how to get a diagnosis, and where to find help and support in the [dementia section](#).

More useful links

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[Risks of buying illegally-imported dogs](#)

If you're thinking of buying a pet dog, beware unknowingly paying for one which has come from outside the UK and has not been properly vaccinated. Disease and having the dog quarantined are some of the risks.

Illegal trade

There is an ongoing illegal trade in pups imported from eastern Europe. There has been an increase in cases of genuine buyers being duped into buying illegally-imported pups.

These pups are often bred in very poor conditions, which give rise to major health and welfare concerns.

Risk of disease and quarantine

All dogs entering Northern Ireland from outside the UK, must be:

- at least 15 weeks old
- [microchipped](#)
- correctly vaccinated against rabies
- treated for tapeworm (unless the dog comes directly from Finland, Republic of Ireland, Malta or Norway)
- in possession of a pet passport or veterinary certificate

Where the legal requirements are not met, pets will either:

- go into quarantine for a period of up to four months at the owners' expense
- be sent back to the country they have travelled from or
- face the possibility of being destroyed

This is necessary to keep Northern Ireland free of diseases such as rabies and Alveolar Echinococcus (a very severe human disease caused by tapeworms).

Not all families will be able to afford these additional costs and therefore face the risk of having to experience the heartache of not being reunited with their family pet.

Advice

Useful advice about buying puppies (and specifically imported dogs) is provided on the following page:

It also has detailed guidance on the requirements for pet animals being brought into Northern Ireland from countries outside the UK.

Alternatively anyone considering bringing a pet into the country can contact Trade Section, DAERA for advice by:

It is also worth remembering there are many puppies and dogs cared for by local animal charities needing new homes with caring owners.

More useful links

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Think about fire safety over the Christmas period

Be aware of fire safety over the Christmas period and check in on older or vulnerable people. You should also make sure that everyone in your house knows what to do in the event of a fire and how to escape safely.

Extra fire risks at Christmas

Christmas is a time when extra fire hazards are in the home, including:

- candles
- portable heaters
- open fires that haven't been lit for a long time
- fairy lights
- overloaded sockets

Fires can start easily. To reduce the risk of fire over the festive period, you should:

- check that your Christmas lights conform to the British Standard
- never use lights with worn or frayed cables
- turn off lights at night or when you are leaving the house
- never place candles near your Christmas tree, decorations or furnishings

- put candles in a purpose-made holder and on a heat-resistant surface
- never put candles under shelves
- never leave burning candles unattended
- never attach decorations to lights or heaters
- never overload electrical sockets
- never leave a cooker unattended – most fires start in the kitchen
- make sure cigarettes are completely stubbed out before going to bed
- keep candles, lighters and matches out of the reach of children
- keep heaters away from soft furnishings and decorations

You can find out more about fire safety at the following links:

Also, people relax and can sometimes become complacent about their fire safety. You should:

- test your smoke alarm(s) every week and make sure to replace the battery or the smoke alarm if it is not working
- make sure anyone staying in your house knows what to do in an emergency – make a fire escape plan
- take the time to check on elderly or vulnerable relatives and neighbours this Christmas – make sure they are fire safe

You should try and celebrate Christmas and New Year safely – the risk of accidents is greater after [drinking alcohol](#).

Older or vulnerable people

Check in with older family, friends, neighbours and those who are isolated in the community and make sure they have a working smoke alarm.

Check their home for Christmas fire hazards and advise them of steps they can take to help 'STOP' fire in their home.

If you're worried about the fire safety of someone in your community you can register them for a [free Home Fire Safety Check](#).

Firefighters will install or check that smoke alarms are working, help to identify any obvious dangers, and advise on an escape plan.

More useful links