



PhotoDisc

Turkey Basics: Handling Cooked Dinners

Take-out Dinners Hot from the Oven

Eating Within 2 hours?

Pick up the food hot...and keep it hot. Keeping food warm is not enough. Harmful bacteria multiply fastest between 40 and 140 °F.

Set oven temperature high enough to keep the turkey at 140 °F or above. Use a food thermometer to check. Stuffing and side dishes must also stay hot (at 140 °F or above). Covering with foil will help keep the food moist.

Eating Much Later?

It's not a good idea to keep food hot longer than 2 hours. It is better if you:

- Remove all stuffing from the turkey cavity immediately and refrigerate it.
- Cut turkey into smaller pieces and refrigerate. Slice breast meat; legs and wings may be left whole.
- Refrigerate potatoes, gravy, and vegetables in shallow containers.

Reheating?

Reheat thoroughly to 165 °F or until hot and steaming. Bring gravy to a rolling boil.

In the microwave oven, cover food and rotate dish so it heats evenly. Follow the microwave manufacturer's instructions.

Cooked and Refrigerated

Keep Cold Food Cold

Refrigerate cold food as soon as you get home (always within 2 hours). Serve your meal within 3 to 4 days.

Reheating a Whole Turkey is NOT Recommended. If you plan to reheat a turkey, cut the meat into smaller pieces. Slice breast meat. Legs and wings may be left whole. Refrigerate in shallow containers.

Exception: Cooked turkeys with the USDA inspection seal on the packaging have been processed under controlled conditions. Follow package directions for reheating and storing.

Handling Leftovers

Perishable foods should not be left out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours. Refrigerate or freeze leftovers promptly in shallow containers.

Storage of Leftovers

It IS safe to freeze leftover turkey and trimmings — even if you purchased them frozen. Wrap tightly for best quality.

Refrigerator (40 °F or below)

Cooked turkey	3 to 4 days
Cooked dishes and gravy	3 to 4 days

Cooked Frozen Turkey; Side Dishes

Is the USDA Inspection Seal Visible?

This seal on the label tells you the turkey was prepared in a USDA-inspected plant. Read and follow package directions for thawing, reheating, and storing.

No Handling Instructions on the Label? Follow these steps:

- Thaw the wrapped, cooked, frozen turkey on a tray in the refrigerator. Allow about a day for every 4 to 5 pounds. Small packages such as stuffing, gravy, or potatoes will thaw in less time. Side dishes can go from the freezer to the oven.
- Once the cooked turkey thaws, eat it (either cold or reheated to 165 °F) within 3 to 4 days.
- To reheat turkey, cut the meat into small pieces. Slice the breast meat. Legs and wings may be left whole.

Freezer (0 °F or below)

Turkey, plain	4 mos.
slices or pieces	
Turkey covered with	6 mos.
broth or gravy	
Cooked poultry dishes,	4-6 mos.
stuffing, and gravy	

(Freezer storage times are for **quality only**. Frozen foods remain safe indefinitely.)



Call the USDA Meat & Poultry Hotline 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854)

Year-round Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET (English or Spanish). Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.

Send E-mail questions to MPHotline.fsis@usda.gov.

AskKaren.gov

For automated responses via the Internet 24 hours a day and a live chat during Hotline hours.

