Senior Nutrition News

Eat Smart Idaho

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Turkey Tips for a Healthy Thanksgiving



Adults over 65 are at higher risk for foodborne illness, so following safe food handling, cooking, and storage practices is essential. Here are answers to some common Thanksgiving cooking questions:

What is the best way to prevent foodborne illness?
Wash your hands before, during, and after food preparation for 20 seconds with soap and warm water.

Should I thaw my frozen turkey on the counter at room temperature?
Never.

What's the safest way to thaw a turkey?
Thaw turkey and other frozen meats in the refrigerator in a container to catch the juices. It takes about 1 day for every 4-5 pounds to thaw a turkey in the refrigerator.

Should I wash my turkey before I prepare it?
Never. Washing meat and poultry is an unnecessary process that puts you at high risk of cross-contaminating everything else you may be handling that day.



How can I tell when my turkey is done?
Cook turkey to 165°F. Use a food thermometer inserted into the thickest portions of the breast, thigh, and wing joint (making sure your thermometer does not touch the bone). Even if your turkey has a pop-up temperature indicator, you should still use a food thermometer to check that it is safely cooked.

Can I leave the leftovers out to snack on?
Please don't! Temperatures between 40°F and 140°F are considered the "Danger Zone". This is the prime temperature range that bacteria grows. Within 2 hours of finishing dinner, refrigerate leftover foods in shallow containers. Make sure to use any refrigerated leftovers within 3-4 days. You can also freeze leftovers for up to 6 months.

Thanksgiving Dinner Remade

Not sure what to do with your leftovers? Try these quick and easy leftover ideas:



Cranberry smoothies: Blend cranberries, frozen low-fat yogurt and orange juice.

Crunchy turkey salad: Toss cubed turkey with celery, apples, and light mayo with shredded spinach.

Stuffing frittata: Mix stuffing with egg and cook thoroughly, pancake-style.

Turkey berry wrap: Wrap sliced turkey, spread with cranberry sauce and shredded greens in a whole wheat tortilla.

Thanksgiving Casserole: Layer your leftovers (stuffing, turkey, green beans, mashed potatoes, gravy, and anything else) into a baking pan, bake, and enjoy!

Turkey Enchiladas/Fajitas/Tacos: Fill tortillas up with shredded turkey instead of chicken and add cheese and any other leftovers you think would be good in there!

Turkey Stuffed Bell Peppers: stuff your favorite color bell pepper with turkey, mashed potatoes, green beans, stuffing and shredded cheese.

Turkey Soup: Add turkey or other leftover vegetables to your favorite soup.

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Sources: https://www.uaex.uada.edu/life-skills-wellness/food-nutrition/eating-well/arkansas-foods-blog/posts/happy-healthy-thanksgiving.aspx**;** https://uwyoextension.org/uwnutrition/newsletters/10-ways-to-turn-your-thanksgiving-leftovers-into-planned-overs/; https://www.eatright.org/food/cultural-cuisines-and-traditions/holidays-and-celebrations/reinventing-thanksgiving retrieved 09/28/26

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