

Cooking the Turkey for the Holidays



Yes, turkeys are cooking faster than before, but cooking time is not everything. Recommended cooking techniques should also be followed. A cooking thermometer should be used to ensure a sufficient internal temperature is reached to destroy bacteria (preventing foodborne illness) and prevent overcooking.

Keep in Mind --

There are many factors that can affect the roasting time of a whole turkey:

- Partially frozen birds take longer to cook.
- Dark roasting pans cook faster than shiny metal pans.
- Depth and size of pan can affect heat circulation.
- Using a foil tent can slow down cooking.
- Using a roasting pan lid speeds up cooking.
- Using an oven bag can speed up cooking time.
- A stuffed bird takes longer to cook.
- The oven may heat the food unevenly.
- The oven's thermostat may be inaccurate.
- The position of the oven rack can affect even cooking and heat circulation.
- A turkey or its pan being too large for the oven (blocks circulation of heat) can effect cooking time.

Approximate Cooking Times

Timetable for Roasting Fresh or Thawed Turkey Breast or Whole Turkey		
WEIGHT (pounds)	HOURS (unstuffed)	HOURS (stuffed)
4 to 6 (breast)	1 ½ to 2 ¼	not applicable
6 to 8 (breast)	2 ¼ to 3 ¼	not applicable
8 to 12	2 ¾ to 3	3 to 3 ½
12 to 14	3 to 3 ¾	3 ½ to 4
14 to 18	3 ¾ to 4 ¼	4 to 4 ¼
18 to 20	4 ¼ to 4 ½	4 ¼ to 4 ¾
20 to 24	4 ½ to 5	4 ¾ to 5 ¼

Roasting Chart for Fresh or Thawed Turkey Cooked in an Oven Cooking Bag

WEIGHT (pounds)	HOURS (unstuffed)	HOURS (stuffed)
8 to 12	1 ¾ to 2 ¼	2 ¼ to 2 ¾
12 to 16	2 ¼ to 2 ¾	2 ¾ to 3 ¼
16 to 20	2 ¾ to 3 ¼	3 ¼ to 3 ¾
20 to 24	3 ¼ to 3 ¾	3 ¾ to 4 ¼

Critical Cooking Instructions

- Set the oven temperature no lower than 325°F.
- Place turkey breast-side up on a rack in a shallow roasting pan.
- For safety and doneness, the internal temperature, as registered on a meat thermometer, must reach a minimum of 180°F. in the thigh (turkey breast must reach a minimum of 170°F. in the thickest part) before removing from the oven.
- Check periodically to see if “pop-up” temperature indicator device has activated indicating that the bird has reached the final temperature for safety and doneness. Check temperature with an oven-proof or instant-read thermometer.
- Juices should be clear.
- The center of the stuffing should reach 165°F. after standing time.
- Let bird stand 20 minutes before carving.
- For uniform results, it is recommended to cook stuffing outside the bird. If stuffed, stuff loosely.

Source: Food Safety and Inspection Service, Food Safety and Communications