



Healthier Me

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Healthier Me is a quarterly publication

This issue will teach you how to choose your holiday turkey, thaw it, prepare it, and safely store the leftovers. There is also helpful information about the dates found on other food products you purchase every day.



Countdown to the Thanksgiving holiday

As Thanksgiving approaches, cooking the traditional turkey dinner gives rise to anxieties and questions. What kind of turkey should I buy? Should I buy a frozen turkey or a fresh one? How do I store my turkey? A few simple steps will not only ease your holiday fears, but will ensure a delicious and a safe meal for you, your family, and your friends. The following information may help you prepare your special Thanksgiving meal and help you countdown to the holiday.

Plan ahead

Plan your menu several weeks before the holiday. Shopping early will ease the countdown tension for your Thanksgiving meal. Ask these questions to help

plan your meal: Do you want a fresh or frozen turkey? Do you have enough space to store a frozen bird if purchased in advance; if not, when should you purchase the turkey? What size bird do you need to buy?

Fresh or frozen

If you choose to buy a frozen bird you may do so at any time, but make sure you have adequate storage space in your freezer. If you buy a fresh turkey, be sure you purchase it only one to two days before cooking. Do not buy a pre-stuffed fresh turkey.

Use the following charts as a guide:

What Size Turkey to Purchase	
Type of Turkey	Pounds to Buy
Whole bird	1 pound per person
Boneless breast of turkey	½ pound per person
Breast of turkey	¾ pound per person
Pre-stuffed frozen turkey	1 ¼ pounds per person – keep frozen until ready to cook

Thawing Time in the Refrigerator	
Size of Turkey	Number of Days
4 to 12 pounds	1 to 3 days
12 to 16 pounds	3 to 4 days
16 to 20 pounds	4 to 5 days
20 to 24 pounds	5 to 6 days

Place frozen bird in original wrapper in the refrigerator (40 °F or below). Allow approximately 24 hours per 4 to 5 pounds of turkey. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for one to two days.

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In cold water

If you forget to thaw the turkey or don't have room in the refrigerator for thawing, don't panic. You can submerge the turkey in cold water and change the water every 30 minutes. Allow about 30 minutes defrosting time per pound of turkey. The table below shows suggested times for thawing a turkey in water. Cook immediately after thawing.

In the microwave

Microwave thawing is safe if the turkey is not too large. Check the manufacturer's instructions for the size turkey that will fit into your microwave, the minutes per pound, and the power level to use for thawing. Cook immediately after thawing.

Preparation

The day before Thanksgiving

Make sure you have all the ingredients you need to prepare your holiday meal. Check to make sure you have all

the equipment you will need, including a roasting pan large enough to hold your turkey and a food thermometer. Wet and dry stuffing ingredients can be prepared ahead of time and refrigerated separately. This may also be done on Thanksgiving Day. Mix ingredients just before placing the stuffing inside the turkey cavity or into a casserole dish.



Thanksgiving Day

If you choose to stuff your turkey, stuff loosely. The stuffing should be moist, not dry, since heat destroys bacteria more rapidly in a moist environment. Place the stuffed turkey in the oven immediately. You may also cook the stuffing outside the bird in a casserole. Judging the cooking time for your turkey will be easier if the chart below is used. The times listed are for a fresh or thawed turkey in an oven at 325 °F. These times are approximate.

Thawing Time in Cold Water	
Size of Turkey	Hours to Defrost
4 to 12 pounds	2 to 6 hours
12 to 16 pounds	6 to 8 hours
16 to 20 pounds	8 to 10 hours
20 to 24 pounds	10 to 12 hours

Timetable for Turkey Roasting (325 °F oven temperature)

Cooking Time: Unstuffed		Cooking Time: Stuffed	
Size of Turkey	Hours to Prepare	Size of Turkey	Hours to Prepare
8 to 12 pounds	2 ¾ to 3 hours	8 to 12 pounds	3 to 3 ½ hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3 ¾ hours	12 to 14 pounds	3 ½ to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	3 ¾ to 4 ¼ hours	14 to 18 pounds	4 to 4 ¼ hours
18 to 20 pounds	4 ¼ to 4 ½ hours	18 to 20 pounds	4 ¼ to 4 ¾ hours
20 to 24 pounds	4 ½ to 5 hours	20 to 24 pounds	4 ¾ to 5 ¼ hours

Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the turkey.

A whole turkey is safe cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165 °F throughout the bird. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. All turkey meat, including any that remains pink, is safe to eat as soon as all parts reach at least 165 °F. The stuffing should reach 165 °F, whether cooked inside the bird or in a separate dish. When the tur-

key is removed from the oven, let it stand 20 minutes. Remove the stuffing and carve the turkey.

Storing Leftovers

Cut the turkey into small pieces; refrigerate the stuffing and turkey separately in shallow containers within two hours of cooking. Use leftover turkey and stuffing within three to four days or freeze these foods. Reheat thoroughly to a temperature of 165 °F or until hot and steaming.

Source: USDA – Food Safety and Inspection Service

Food product dating

What is dating?

Open dating (use of a calendar date as opposed to a code) on a food product is a date stamped on a product's package to help the store determine how long to display the product for sale. It can also help the purchaser to know the time limit to purchase or use the product at its best quality. It is not a safety date. After the date passes, while not of best quality, the product should still be safe if handled properly and kept at 40 °F or below for the recommended storage times listed on the chart (see the following page). If product has a use by date, follow that date. If product has a sell-by date or no date, cook or freeze the product by the times on the chart.

Is dating required by federal law?

Except for infant formula and some baby food, product dating is not generally required by Federal regulations. However, if a calendar date is used, it must express both the month and day of the month (and the year, in the case of shelf-stable and frozen products). If a calendar date is shown, immediately adjacent to the date must be a phrase explaining the meaning of that date such as sell-by or use before.

There is no uniform or universally accepted system used for food dating in the United States. Although dating of some foods is required by more than 20 states, there are areas of the country where much of the food supply has some type of open date and other areas where almost no food is dated.

What types of food are dated?

Open dating is found primarily on perishable foods such as meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products. Closed or coded dating might appear on shelf-stable products such as cans and boxes of food.

Types of dates

- **A sell-by date** tells the store how long to display the product for sale. You should buy the product before the date expires.
- **A best if used by (or before) date** is recommended for best flavor or quality. It is not a purchase or safety date.
- **A use-by date** is the last date recommended for the use of the product while at peak quality. The date has been determined by the manufacturer of the product.
- **Closed or coded dates** are packing numbers for use by the manufacturer.

Safety after date expires

Except for use-by dates, product dates don't always refer to home storage and use after purchase. Use-by dates usually refer to best quality and are not safety dates. But even if the date expires during home storage, a product should be safe, wholesome, and of good quality — if handled properly and kept at

40° F or below. See the accompanying refrigerator charts for storage times of dated products. If product has a use-by date, follow that date. If product has a sell-by date or no date, cook or freeze the product by the times on the chart.

Foods can develop an off odor, flavor, or appearance due to spoilage bacteria. If a food has developed such characteristics, you should not use it for quality reasons.

If foods are mishandled, however, foodborne bacteria can grow and cause foodborne illness — before or after the date on the package. For example, if hot dogs are taken to a picnic and left out several hours, they wouldn't be safe if used thereafter, even if the date hasn't expired.

Other examples of potential mishandling are products that have been defrosted at room temperature more than two hours, cross contaminated, or handled by people who don't use proper sanitary practices. Make sure to follow the handling and preparation instructions on the label to ensure top quality and safety.

What do can codes mean?

Cans must exhibit a packing code to enable tracking of the product in interstate commerce. This enables manufacturers to rotate their stock as well as to locate their products in the event of a recall.

These codes, which appear as a series of letters and/or numbers, might refer to the date or time of manufacture. They aren't meant for the consumer to interpret as use-by dates. There is no book that tells how to translate the codes into dates.

Cans may also display open or calendar dates. Usually these are best if used by dates for peak quality.

In general, high-acid canned foods such as tomatoes, grapefruit, and pineapple can be stored on the shelf 12 to 18 months; low-acid canned foods such as meat, poultry, fish, and most vegetables will keep two to five years — if the can remains in good condition and has been stored in a cool, clean, dry place.

Dates on egg cartons

Use of either a sell-by or expiration (EXP) date is not federally required, but may be state required, as defined by the egg laws in the state where the eggs are marketed. Some state egg laws do not allow the use of a sell-by date.

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Many eggs reach stores only a few days after the hen lays them. Egg cartons with the USDA grade shield on them must display the pack date (the day that the eggs were washed, graded, and placed in the carton). The number is a three-digit code that represents the consecutive day of the year (the Julian Date) starting with January 1 as 001 and ending with December 31 as 365. When a sell-by date appears on a carton bearing the USDA grade shield, the code date may not exceed 45 days from the date of pack.

Always purchase eggs before the sell-by or EXP date on the carton. After the eggs reach home, refrigerate the eggs in their original carton and place them in the coldest part of the refrigerator, not in the door. For best quality, use eggs within three to five weeks of the date you purchase them. The sell-by date will usually expire during that length of time, but the eggs are perfectly safe to use.

UPC or bar codes

Universal Product Codes (UPC) appear on packages as black lines of varying widths above a series of numbers. They are not required by regulation but manufacturers print them on most product labels because scanners at supermarkets can "read" them quickly to record the price at checkout.

Bar codes are used by stores and manufacturers for inventory purposes and marketing information. When read by a computer, they can reveal such specific information as the manufacturer's name, product name, size of product, and price. The numbers are not used to identify recalled products.

Refrigerator home storage (at 40 °F or below) of fresh or uncooked products

If a product has a use-by date, follow that date. If product has a sell-by or no date, cook or freeze the product by the times on the following chart.

Storage of Fresh or Uncooked Products	
Product	Storage Times After Purchase
Poultry	1 or 2 days
Beef, Veal, Pork, and Lamb	3 to 5 days
Ground Meat and Ground Poultry	1 or 2 days
Fresh Variety Meats (<i>Liver, Tongue, Brain, Kidneys, Heart, Chitterlings</i>)	1 or 2 days
Cured Ham, Cook-Before-Eating	5 to 7 days
Sausage from Pork, Beef, or Turkey, Uncooked	1 or 2 days
Eggs	3 to 5 weeks

Refrigerator home storage (at 40 °F or below) of processed products sealed at plant

If product has a use-by date, follow that date.

If product has a sell-by or no date, cook or freeze the product by the times on the following chart.

Storage of Processed Products Sealed at Plant		
Processed Product	Unopened, After	Purchase After Opening
Cooked Poultry	3 to 4 days	3 to 4 days
Cooked Sausage	3 to 4 days	3 to 4 days
Sausage, Hard/Dry, shelf-stable	6 weeks/pantry	3 weeks
Corned Beef, uncooked, in pouch with pickling juices	5 to 7 days	3 to 4 days
Vacuum-packed Dinners, Commercial Brand with USDA seal	2 weeks	3 to 4 days
Bacon	2 weeks	7 days
Hot dogs	2 weeks	1 week
Luncheon meat	2 weeks	3 to 5 days
Ham, fully cooked	7 days	slices, 3 days; whole, 7 days
Ham, canned, labeled "keep refrigerated"	9 months	3 to 4 days
Ham, canned, shelf stable	2 years/pantry	3 to 5 days
Canned Meat and Poultry, shelf stable	2 to 5 years/pantry	3 to 4 days

Source: USDA – Food Safety and Inspection Service

For more information on nutrition, visit the website www.mypyramid.gov or contact Ines Beltran with Gwinnett Cooperative Extension at 678.377.4010.