Turkey Talks – Cooking the Turkey

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Ok, so I have the turkey bought! Now what? Trying to remember what Mom or Grandma did. Let’s see, the night before they butchered the turkey, cleaned it in the kitchen sink, mixed up stuffing and packed it in the cavity, got up at 4:00 a.m. put the bird in a 500 degree oven and went back to bed. WRONG!!

To continue on with our series of preparing the Thanksgiving meal we’ll investigate how to cook the turkey safely.

**Clean the turkey:** Never wash a turkey or other raw poultry in the sink to prep it for cooking. There is no safety benefit to rinsing poultry. Washing raw poultry greatly increases the chances of food poisoning as water with the raw turkey juice is likely to splash the cook and the cooking area. Be sure to sanitize the sink and counter with a solution of bleach and water to destroy any bacteria especially Salmonella so that your other Thanksgiving food will not become contaminated.

**Temperature of oven.** Roast a turkey by USDA recommendations. USDA recommends allowing 20 minutes per pound at a temperature of 350 degrees F. Never cook the turkey lower than 325 degrees F. Allow 15-20 minutes for cooked turkey to stand prior to carving. A roasting bag can be used safely and helps retain moisture in the bird. If the bird becomes overly browned before 165°F internal temperature is reached, fold a piece of foil and “tent” the bird.

**Stuff safely.** Stuffing and dressing should be cooked separately to ensure the bird cooks all the way to 165 degrees Fahrenheit and that your dressing isn’t based on raw turkey juices. Stuffing and dressing recipes must be cooked to a minimum temperature of 165 °F. *(For optimum safety and more even cooking, it’s recommended to cook your stuffing in a casserole dish.)*

**Time to cook.** Juices, joints and timers cannot tell when turkey is fully cooked. A calibrated meat thermometer can. The single most important thing to know, no matter the cooking method, is that the turkey must be cooked to the proper internal temperature as measured with a food thermometer. Use the thermometer to take temperatures in three places in the thickest areas of the bird, the breast, thigh and leg. The bird is safe to serve once it reaches 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

**Safe carving and serving.** It’s best to let the turkey rest for 15 - 20 minutes before carving to allow the juices to set, so the turkey will carve more easily. Use a clean, sanitized, cutting board that has a well to catch juices. Remove all stuffing from the turkey cavity. Make sure your knife is sharp before you start carving. Do not leave any extra turkey, stuffing or other leftovers out for more than two hours.

Remember bacteria never takes a holiday, so it’s important to be mindful this Thanksgiving of the four core messages of food safety - clean, separate, cook, and chill.

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