

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

November 14, 2011

Rebecca Burns,
Environmental Health Services Director
517-279-9561, ext. 143
Theresa Christner, Health Ed./Health Promotion Dir.
517-279-9561, ext. 144

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Turkey Tidbits!

Whether your turkey is a Tom or a Henrietta, you can be sure that your Thanksgiving Dinner is delicious and safe to consume by planning ahead. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers the following Turkey Tidbits to help you be the host or hostess with the mostest on Thanksgiving Day!

What size Turkey should I buy? According to Foodsafety.gov, you should purchase a pound of turkey for each guest. For a crowd of 20, a 20 pound turkey is ample. If you know your guests are big eaters and/or you want plenty of leftovers for sandwiches, you should purchase 1.5 pounds per person.

How soon should I buy my turkey ahead? If you purchase a frozen turkey and place it in your freezer, it will be good indefinitely from a safety point as long as it remains frozen. However, it may not taste quite as good. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) recommends eating frozen poultry within a year in order to assure best quality. Fresh turkeys should be refrigerated immediately and cooked within one to two days.

How long does it take to defrost my frozen turkey? A good rule of thumb is one day in the refrigerator for every four to five pounds. A turkey that weighs 16 pounds should be thawed in 4 days. Be sure to place it in a container to catch any raw juices that may drip during thawing. You may also thaw your bird in cold water, making sure to change the water every half hour. Using this method, plan on 30 minutes for each pound of turkey. **Never thaw your turkey at room temperature!**

Which is more tender, a Hen or a Tom? The turkey's tenderness is determined by age not by its sex. Young turkeys are usually 4 to 6 months of age and are the tenderest.

So what is the difference between a Hen and a Tom? Besides sex, hens (female turkey) typically weigh less than 16 pounds, while Toms (male turkeys) usually weigh 16 pounds or more.

How long should my bird cook? Of course, cooking time depends on size, but regardless of the size, the turkey is not 'done' until the food thermometer reaches a minimum temperature of 165°F. (Meat thermometers, the type that are left in the meat while cooking in the oven, should read 180°F.)

To cook, set the oven temperature no lower than 325°F and be sure the turkey is completely thawed. Remove the packages containing the neck and giblets from neck and body cavities. Place turkey breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan 2 to 2-1/2 inches deep. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast, even if your turkey has a "pop-up" temperature indicator. For reasons of personal preference, you may choose to cook turkey to higher temperatures. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before carving the meat.

My turkey is done before the rest of my dinner, what should I do? Not a problem. Reduce the oven temperature to 200°F and return the turkey to the oven. Check periodically to make sure your turkey doesn't fall below 135°F and keep the bird covered to make sure it doesn't dry out.

My turkey is not done on time, what do I do? There is no way to cook a turkey faster. Remember, opening and closing the oven door repeatedly will only reduce the oven's temperature and add to the overall cooking time of the bird.

Should I roast the bird ahead of time? Many people are opting to cook their turkey the day before. If you decide to try this, be sure that once the bird is thoroughly cooked you cut it into smaller pieces and store in the refrigerator in shallow containers to cool. To reheat your turkey in the oven:

- Set the oven temperature no lower than 325 °F.

- Reheat turkey to an internal temperature of 165 °F.
- Keep the turkey moist by adding a little broth or water and cover.

To reheat in a Microwave Oven:

- Cover your food and rotate it for even heating. Allow standing time.
- Check the internal temperature to make sure it reaches 165 °F.
- Consult your microwave oven owner's manual for recommended times and power levels.

REMEMBER! Always wash hands, utensils, the sink, and anything else that comes in contact with raw turkey and its juices with soap and hot water.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency wishes you and your family a very Happy and Safe Thanksgiving. To learn more about cooking a Turkey, including how to deep fry a Turkey, check out our FAQ section of our website at: www.bhsj.org.