

Don't Be a Turkey this Holiday Season!

Target Audience:

Adults
Seniors

Topic Areas:

Keeping Germs out of my Food

Objectives:

- Thaw foods in the refrigerator, under cold water or in the microwave,
- Store leftovers in air-tight wraps, bags or containers.
- Place leftover foods in the refrigerator within 1 to 2 hours of serving
- Eat leftovers within 3 to 4 days unless they have been frozen and heat to 165° before eating

Audience Alert

This lesson works best when there was at least one person in each group had cooked a turkey at least once. Also, this lesson does not work well for groups who prepare and store holiday food in group situations.

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Lesson Creator(s):

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Purpose:

The purpose of this lesson is to help participants use safe methods to prepare and store turkey and other holiday foods.

What the Nutrition Educator Needs to Know So That Participants' Questions Can Be Answered:

The holiday season is a fun time when families gather and enjoy special foods. At this time we do not always think about the risks of eating food that may not be cooked to a temperature that will kill bacteria and other germs that can harm us. These germs can make us sick and give us food poisoning. Most of the time people do not think about food poisoning until after they get sick.

Many of us eat turkey at holiday meals. There are many ways bad bacteria or germs can get into your turkey and make you sick. To learn about what you need to do to prepare and cook your turkey safely, look at the "Turkey Basics Fact Sheets"^{1,2,3,4,5} at the end of this lesson. This information will help you answer participants' questions.

Bacteria grow best and very fast where it is warm and moist. The danger zone for bacteria when they grow the fastest is between 40°F and 140°F.⁶ Food left out for

several hours can be in that range and bacteria can grow very quickly. See the picture at the end of the lesson that shows fast bacteria can grow.⁷

Even after as little as ½ hour one bacteria can grow into two bacteria. This may not seem like a lot. However food can have thousands of bacteria and if this bacteria starts to grow you can have millions of bacteria in your food in no time.⁷ You should throw out any food that has been sitting out for more than 2 hours. It is not safe to eat.⁸

Many people look forward to leftovers after a holiday meal. Turkey, stuffing, and mashed potatoes and leftover veggies can make quick and healthy lunches for the rest of the week. This can help save you money and time. That means you have to shop for less food and have food for lunches and other meals that does not need to be cooked, only reheated. Leftovers are good to eat but you have to be careful how you store them. If you are not careful when how you store your food, bacteria can grow and make you sick. You can keep this from happening if you store your leftovers the right way.

What is the best way to store food as leftovers? Wrap your food tightly in foil, plastic bags and wraps or airtight plastic containers before you put it in the refrigerator or freezer. This will help to keep the flavor fresh and the food safe while it is being stored in the fridge or freezer.⁵ For information on how long you can keep leftovers in the fridge or freezer, see the NJ SNAP-Ed lesson *Taste It Or Toss It: How To Tell If Your Food Is Too Old To Eat*. Another way that you can make sure your leftovers are safe is to keep the temperature of your refrigerator cold. You want your fridge temperature to be low enough so bacteria cannot grow. Make sure that it is high enough that your food will not freeze. Keep your refrigerator at or below 40°F⁴. You can buy a low cost refrigerator thermometer to be sure your fridge is 40°F or below.

Safely storing food is not the only food safety rule you need to follow. When you take leftovers from the fridge or freezer, you must make sure to heat them to 165°F before eating them.⁸ Heating your food to the right temperature is how you keep your food safe to eat. If you are heating foods in the microwave there are many tips to follow. Microwaves can leave cold spots in foods. Bacteria can live in these spots. Rotate food items in the microwave at least once while they cook to make sure there are no cold spots. Stir and turn the food at least one time for even cooking. This is even more important for soup, stew, stuffing, and gravy. To make sure that food or leftovers cooked in the microwave are done, you can use a microwave proof temperature probe or a meat thermometer. Check the temperature of the food at in different spots.⁵

References:

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9. *Handle Leftovers with Care*, Food Safety.gov, March, 2011 available at: <http://www.foodsafety.gov/blog/leftovers.html>. Retrieved September 2014

For Additional Reading:

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Don't Be a Turkey this Holiday Season!

Main Themes:

Nutrition & Diet

Cooking & Food Storage

Shopping

Budgeting

Safety & Sanitation

Materials Needed:

Poem: “‘Twas the Night after Xmas” – 1 copy for the educator

Handouts: “Turkey Tips” 1 blank copy for each participant

Handouts: “Fact Sheets 1-4” 1 copy of each for the educator

Handouts: “Guide Questions” – 1 copy of each

Markers or pens/pencils

Time the Activity is Expected to Take:

Activity 1: 10 minutes

Activity 2: 40 minutes

Next Week's Goals: 5 minutes

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Lesson Plan:

Before You Begin (2 – 5 minutes):

1. Ask the participants if they worked on their goals from the last lesson. Ask them which goals they worked on and how or what they did to work on them. Try to get people to tell the class what they did. If they did not work on the goals, ask them to work on them before the next class.
2. Tell the participants what the objectives are for today's lesson.

Activity 1: “The Germs Who Stole the Holidays” (10 minutes)

1. For the first activity, tell the class:
 - You are going to read them a poem you want them to listen to.
 - There will be words in the poem that they may not know. These words are all names of bacteria or germs that live and grow in or on food.
 - These germs can make you sick if you do not handle, cook and store your food the right way.
 - Tell them that they may not celebrate the holiday in the poem, but the poem describes a good example of what can happen to food from *any* holiday.
2. Read the poem, “‘Twas the Night After Xmas”.
3. Ask the class:
 - Do they ever think of the holidays as a time when they could become sick from food poisoning?
 - What food safety ideas do they follow at home to stop germs from making them and their family sick after a holiday meal?
4. Tell the class that today's class will be looking at ways to protect their family's meals from ruining their holiday fun.

Activity 2: “Turkey Talk” (40 minutes)

There are many different ways people handle and cook turkey. The object of this activity is for participants to share their ways and make sure that their methods are

safe. The class will talk about handling the turkey from the time they buy it, to the time they store the leftovers.

1. Divide the class into 4 groups. Give each group a different “Guide Question” sheet. If the class has less than 8 people, divide the class into 2 groups and give each group 2 “Guide Question” sheets. Tell the class that they are to talk in their group to decide on some answers to the questions on their paper. The idea is to think of safe methods to make and store turkey at each step along the way. There are many safety tips that can be used. After the group discussed its answers, they will share their information with the other groups.
2. Keep track of the time to make sure the group discussions do not go over 25 minutes. Remind people of the time every few minutes .
3. As the groups are talking, walk around the room. Answer any questions and guide their answers. Use the info on the “Turkey Fact Sheets.” While you are walking around, hand one “Turkey Tips” sheet to each participant. Tell them that they will be using this sheet to write down ideas during the class discussion later in the activity.
4. Once the groups are done, ask them to use the “Turkey Tips” handout to write down 5 tips or ideas that they learned during the discussion. Tips can range from recipe ideas to ideas to keep food safe. All these tips should be ones that they are willing to try at home.
5. Begin with the group that talked about how to safely store and thaw an uncooked turkey - “Guide Questions 1”. Use the “Guide Questions” and “Fact Sheets” to guide the discussion and answer any questions. As each group is done talking ask the rest of the class to give some other ideas that were not mentioned yet.
6. Once people run out of ideas for thawing and storing the turkey and all the questions are covered, ask the next group to share some safety tips that they use at home to prepare to cook the turkey. Use the “Guide Questions” and “Fact Sheets” to guide the discussion and answer any questions. Once again, when the group is done, ask the rest of the class to give some other ideas not mentioned yet.
7. Repeat Steps 5-6 with the last two groups, about ways to safely cook turkey (“Guide Questions 3”) and store and reheat any leftovers (“Guide Questions 4”).

8. Ask each person in the class to share with the group some of the tips that they wrote down that they thought were important. After each person reads off their list, ask them which of the tips they will use at home when cooking for the next holiday.

Next Week's Goals: (5 minutes)

1. Ask the participants to name one thing that they learned in today's class that they will use at home to keep their family's food safe. If participants do not mention something that covers each learning objective, be sure to remind them of the objective again. Ask them to choose a related goal to work on during the week. Let them know that they will be sharing their personal experiences during the next class. Invite comments, suggestions, or questions.
2. Thank the participants for coming and tell them what the class will be about in the next lesson.

For the Teacher: "What makes this lesson behaviorally focused?"

- In Activity 1, participants explain what they do at home that keeps their family's food safe during holiday time.
- In Activity 2 participants talk about and share ways that they can thaw, prepare, cook and handle leftover food during holiday time to keep germs from getting into their food. They take note of any new ideas that they learned during the discussion.
- In Next Week's Goals, the participants name one thing that they learned during the class that they will use at home. By reviewing the objectives the participants are reminded of the information they learned from the lesson, and retell some of the main ideas they will take with them and work on during the coming week.



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'Twas the Night After The Feast

'Twas the night after the feast
And all through the kitchen
Little creatures were stirring up
Potions bewitching

Salmonella were working
In gravy and soup
In the hopes they could turn it
To poisonous goop!

Clostridia were nestled
All snug in the ham
While Hep A virus
Danced in the yam

Wash your hands before
cooking!
Put your food away quick!
Or that jolly old food germ
We know as Sir Sick

With his small tiny microbes
Will ruin the feast
As they make their toxins
He calls out to each beast

Now Hepatitis!
Now Staph and Perfringens!
We'll punish those humans
For holiday binges!

On, Botulism!
E. Coli! Shigella!
Go get 'em Amoeba!
Work fast Salmonella!

If those humans can't learn
To handle food right,
A joyous feast they will have
Then a long, sleepless night!



Fact Sheet 1: Storing and Thawing Turkey

If you buy a thawed turkey from a store:

- Store it in the refrigerator at 40° F or below, if you are going to use it within 2 days. Freeze it if you are not going to use right away.
- Put the turkey breast side up on a platter to stop the juices from dripping in the refrigerator.
- Keep it at or below 40°F until just before you put it in the oven.
- Leave it in the original packaging until you are ready to cook it to reduce the risk of germs spreading.

If you buy a frozen turkey:

- Allow 1 pound of turkey per person
- Immediately refrigerate or freeze the turkey once you get it home.
- Refrigerate it if you plan to use it within 2 days.
- Turkeys can be kept frozen indefinitely however for best quality you will need to cook it within a year
- To store for a longer time, keep it frozen until 1-5 days before you plan to cook it.
- Leave it in the original packaging until you are ready to cook it.

If you buy a fresh turkey:

- Buy 1 pound turkey per person
- Buy your turkey only 1 or 2 days before you plan to cook it
- Store in refrigerator until you plan to use it
- Put the turkey breast side up on a platter on a lower shelf to prevent juices from dripping
- Keep turkey in original packaging until you are ready to use

Thawing the turkey:

There are 3 ways to thaw a turkey:

In the refrigerator:

- For best results, thaw the turkey in the refrigerator on a platter or plate on a lower shelf.
- Keep turkey in its original packaging
- A thawed turkey can stay in the refrigerator for up to two days
- A turkey that has been properly thawed in the refrigerator, can be refrozen if necessary
- It takes 24 hours for every 4 to 5 pounds of turkey

In the Microwave:

- Remove all outside packaging
- Place turkey on a microwave safe dish to catch juices
- Make sure to cook the turkey as soon as you take it out of the microwave.

Cold Water Bath:

- For faster thawing use a bath of cold water. Leave it in the original packaging. If there is a leak in the packaging, put a plastic bag over the wrapped turkey. (Water can transmit germs easily throughout the turkey. It also makes the turkey watery, which makes it lose its flavor.)
- Place the wrapped turkey breast down in the water.
- Let it sit in the water for 30 minutes for every pound of turkey.
- Make sure that the water stays cold by changing it every 30 minutes.
- Cook the turkey as soon as you take it out of the water.
- Do not re-freeze

Fact Sheet 2: Preparing for Cooking

Getting the turkey ready:

Please Note: It is no longer recommended that you wash the turkey before cooking. It can spread germs.⁴

- Make sure the turkey is completely thawed for the best texture and flavor.
- Remove the giblets. You can use salt in the cavity of the bird.
- Tuck the wing tips under the shoulders, if you want.
- Wash and sanitize the sink, countertops and your hands after being left without protection from the raw turkey and blood, and also before starting another part of your meal.

Cooking the Stuffing:

- Use only cooked ingredients in stuffing – pre-cook all vegetables, meats, and fish used to season.
- Use pasteurized egg products instead of raw eggs because raw eggs do not get hot enough in the stuffing to kill germs.
- If you cook the stuffing in a separate dish, grease a covered baking dish and bake the stuffing covered at 325°F until it reaches 165°F.
- **You CAN stuff the turkey with stuffing BUT:**
 - Do not stuff until you are ready to cook the turkey.
 - Loosely stuff the cavity of the bird – use no more than $\frac{3}{4}$ cup for every pound of turkey.
 - Cook until the stuffing reaches 165°F. To test the temperature, use a meat thermometer directly in the center of the stuffing in the turkey.

Fact Sheet 3: Cooking/Serving the Turkey

Cooking the Turkey

- Bake at 325°F or higher. Lower temperatures do not make the turkey hot fast enough to kill the germs.
- Do not cook the turkey at a low temperature in the oven overnight or cook it part way ahead of time. This only brings the turkey up to the perfect temperature to grow germs.
- Cooking options:
 - Cook it on a rack to prevent it from sitting in the grease.
 - You can cover the turkey to prevent browning at anytime during cooking.
 - You can oil or butter the skin to keep the skin from dry out.
- Cooking the turkey in its own juices or basting the turkey is not necessary because the juices do not sink in deeply. Also, it reduces the oven temperature when the door is opened and shut.
- You can fully cook the turkey the day before as long as you slice the breast and thigh meat and cut off the drumsticks and wings. This allows the turkey to cool before it stays too long at temperatures where bacteria can grow. You should cover and refrigerate the turkey once you are done cooking it. Reheat it to 165°F.

Is It Done?

- Clear juices coming out of the meat is not a sign that the turkey is done.
- Reading the temperature with a thermometer is the only way to tell when the turkey is done.
- Pop up thermometers that are in the turkey when you buy it may not be in the right place to measure the temperature right.
- A meat thermometer stuck deep in the thigh between the leg and the breast should read 165°F, but make sure the thermometer is not touching the bone.
- The thermometer in the center of the stuffing should read 165°F.

Serving the Turkey

- Immediately remove the stuffing from the turkey as soon as you take it out of the oven.
- Once the turkey is brought up to 165°F, the turkey is safe to eat as long as it remains above 140°F. It should be left out no longer than 2 hours.

Fact Sheet 4: Storing leftovers

Storage of Leftovers

- Throw away any turkey, stuffing, and gravy left out at room temperature for longer than 2 hours or 1 hour if the temperature is above 90°F.
- Cut the breast and thigh pieces into slices.
- Leave the wings and drumsticks whole.
- Store gravy separately.
- Store stuffing separately from the turkey meat.
- Store in shallow dishes with covers or wrapped in foil/plastic wrap within 2 hours of cooking.
- Eat refrigerated leftovers within 3-4 days.
- Gravy, meat broth, and drippings should be used within 1-2 days.
- Freeze leftovers for later use by covering tightly in foil or in freezer bags. They can be frozen for 2-6 months.
- You can freeze the cooked leftover turkey to make soup at a later time.

Re-heating Leftovers

- A thermometer is the only safe way to tell if the food is hot enough to eat. The food should be evenly heated to a temperature of 165°F in the thickest part of the turkey.
- Leftovers can be reheated in the oven, in the microwave, on the stove top or over boiling water. Any way is okay as long as the heated turkey reaches a temperature of 165°F.
- To avoid cold pockets in the microwave, stir the food every few minutes during the cooking.

Guide Questions 1: Storing and Thawing Turkey

How long can you keep a completely thawed turkey in the refrigerator before cooking it?

If you buy a fresh turkey from the store, what is the best way to store it?

How long does it take to thaw a turkey in the refrigerator?

Where do you store a frozen turkey that you are not going to use right away?

What do you store your uncooked turkey in or on while in the refrigerator?

What is the best way to thaw your turkey?

If the turkey will not thaw in time to be ready to cook, what are some other thawing methods to use?

How do you thaw turkey in water?

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Guide Questions 2: Preparing the turkey for cooking

How do you clean and season your turkey?

If you wanted to put your turkey in the oven at 11:00 a.m. on the day of your feast, when would you prepare it for roasting?

Do you cook your stuffing inside or outside the turkey?
What are some safety tips you use to prevent people from becoming sick from your stuffing?

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Guide Questions 3: Cooking and Serving the Turkey

What oven temperature do you cook your turkey at?

How can you safely cook a turkey the night before?

How do you tell when your turkey is fully cooked?

At what temperature is the turkey meat done?

Where do you put the meat thermometer?

How hot should the stuffing be when it is done?

How long can a cooked turkey sit at room temperature before germs can grow?

What should you do with the stuffing as soon as you take the stuffed bird out of the oven?

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Guide Questions 4: Storing and Re-heating Leftovers

Is it safer to store meat, gravy and stuffing leftovers together or separately? What kind of containers do you use?

How long can you keep turkey leftovers?

If you are not able to eat all the leftovers within 3-4 days, what do you do with them?

How do you re-heat your leftovers?

How do you tell when the food is hot enough to eat? How hot should it be?

If you reheat in the microwave, how do you make sure it is heated well?

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Tips for A Safe Turkey

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How fast bacteria grow at room temperature: The danger zone - 40° -140°F

