

# Health Highlights: Properly Thawing and Preparing Turkey

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The holidays are here, and soon we'll prepare Thanksgiving meals for our loved ones featuring a major staple: turkey.



Thawing a Thanksgiving turkey can take days. Ashley Simper, Manager of Dietetic Services with OSF HealthCare, recommends keeping the turkey in the freezer until ready to thaw, maintaining a temperature below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

To thaw, use 24 hours of thaw time per 4 to 5 pounds of turkey. For larger birds, move it from the freezer to the refrigerator the Friday before Thanksgiving.

Another option; tightly wrap the turkey in a bag and submerge it in cold water. Change the water every 30 minutes until thawed. Make sure to allow 30 minutes of thaw time for every one pound of turkey and cook immediately after thawing.

Lastly, if your microwave is large enough, you can use its thaw settings.

To cook, preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Cover the turkey in foil for two hours so the bird doesn't burn.

Then, safely remove the turkey and baste it with oil or butter.

Increase the oven temp to 425 degrees and cook for another 45 minutes if your turkey is 8-10 pounds or more.

Sara Umphleet, a registered dietitian with OSF HealthCare, shares food safety tips.

“You want to make sure before you're cooking it, and setting it up, that you're not washing the turkey. Turkey should never be washed due to cross-contamination,” Umphleet says.

After baking, rest the turkey for 20 to 30 minutes. Check the internal temp with a thermometer, and make sure it's at least 165 degrees Fahrenheit.