



# Talking Turkey — “To Stuff or Not to Stuff”



## To Stuff or Not to Stuff

The holidays usually involve roasting turkeys. A frequently asked question is whether to stuff or not to stuff whole poultry? Either method is acceptable as long as proper cooking and food handling procedures are followed.

Raw poultry can contain disease causing bacteria such as *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella*. When a raw turkey is stuffed, the bacteria from the turkey may be transferred to the stuffing. Because the stuffing is located inside the turkey, extra cooking time is required for the stuffing to reach the correct temperature of 160 degrees Fahrenheit. If you cannot allow for extra cooking time, the stuffing should be cooked in a pan by itself.

A thermistor thermometer should be used to measure the temperature of the stuffing and again it should be cooked to 160 degrees Fahrenheit. “Pop-up” thermometers that come with some turkeys only measure the temperature of the turkey not the temperature of the stuffing.

A thermometer should also be used to check the temperature (160° F) of stuffing cooked separately from the turkey if it contains raw ingredients such as eggs or organ meats.

It is better to stuff the turkey prior to roasting, **NOT** the day before. It takes a long time for the stuffing to cool inside the turkey even when stored in the refrigerator. Loosely pack the stuffing inside the turkey. Allow for 3/4 cup of stuffing per pound of turkey.

When preparing any raw food, be sure to wash surfaces such as utensils, counters, cutting boards, and hands with hot, soapy water when you are finished. In addition, a chlorine solution of 1 teaspoon of household bleach in 1 quart of water can be used if desired to sanitize food contact surfaces after they are cleaned.

## To Wash or Not to Wash

Another commonly asked question concerning turkey preparation is whether or not to wash whole poultry prior to cooking. Washing poultry is generally NOT recommended. Research shows that the reduction

in bacteria on whole poultry after washing and rinsing multiple times is insignificant. Therefore, washing does not eliminate the need to thoroughly cook the poultry to 165° F for SAFETY. Consumers prefer the taste of poultry cooked to 170 to 180° F, therefore the USDA recommends this temperature range for “best” quality.

Also washing poultry may increase the chance of contaminating work surfaces such as sinks, drains, faucets, counters, utensil, etc., and hands.

Contact your local county Cooperative Extension Office for additional information on food safety.

## References

Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS), USDA. Oct. 31, 1996. Food Safety Features: USDA offers advice on stuffing a turkey safely. <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/OA/pubs/countdown.htm>

Woodburn, M. 1989. Myth: Wash Poultry Before Cooking. Dairy, Food and Environmental Sanitation. 9(2):65-67.

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