

**Now You Know****Everything You Always Wanted To Ask About Turkey**

Washington - During the upcoming holidays Americans will eat 800 million pounds of turkey. That boils down to a lot of hours spent in kitchens during the year's busiest season. But for the 40 percent of families that now own microwave ovens, turkey will be faster and easier to prepare. Want to know more about microwaving the holiday bird? These answers to questions consumers are asking USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline (800-535-4555 toll-free), can help you prepare turkey in your microwave safely and quickly.

**Q:** The microwave is often recommended for thawing turkey. Is it a safe thawing method?

**A:** Absolutely. But first check the manufacturer's instructions for the size of turkey that will fit in your oven - usually under 16 pounds. Also, check the power setting to use in defrosting. This will be a low or "defrost" level. A turkey defrosts slowly - at a rate of about nine to 11 minutes per pound - because it is a large, dense item. The low power setting avoids cooking and drying the outer sections before the inner sections thaw.

Follow your oven guidebook closely on the defrosting method. You may need to turn the bird upside down in the pan and rotate it in the oven. It should take one to two hours to defrost and eight- or 11-pound bird and two to three hours to defrost a 12- to 16-pound bird.

**CAUTION:** Never thaw turkey on the kitchen counter. The outer layers thaw faster than inner portions, giving bacteria a chance to grow to dangerous levels in the warmer areas before the whole bird is thawed.

**Q:** My family complains that my turkey is dry. What can I do to keep it moist?

**A:** If you're microwaving the bird, a cooking bag

can help keep it moist. The bag also prevents overcooking of some spots by promoting even heat distribution. Carefully follow the instructions that come with the bag.

In a conventional oven, dry turkey can be caused

by cooking the bird at temperatures higher than the 325 degrees most cookbooks recommend. Keeping the turkey covered while roasting also will help keep the bird moist.

**Q:** A USDA publication says I should wait a

period of time after cooking turkey before I carve it. Why?

**A:** After microwaving your turkey, you should let it stand for at least 10 minutes before serving. During this time the bird is still cooking. The extra

time allows heat to spread evenly throughout the meat and the temperature of the bird to rise to the finishing point. When the standing time is over, you may carve.

You should let a bird stand 20 minutes after

roasting in a conventional oven, too. If you try to slice it too soon, the flesh may fragment. Give it time to cool and the juices to be re-absorbed, and the meat will be a firm texture that produces picture-book slices.

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