It’s the countdown to the Thanksgiving holiday. Planning ahead will not only ease your holiday, but will ensure a delicious, safe meal for everyone. Plan ahead. Shop early. Make sure you have all the ingredients and equipment you need to prepare your holiday meal. What can you prepare in advance? Desserts, stuffing, side dishes? What size turkey do you need?

Fresh or frozen?
If you buy a frozen bird, you may do so at any time if you have adequate storage space. If you buy a fresh turkey, be sure you purchase it only one to two days before cooking.

What size turkey?
Follow these guidelines to figure out how much turkey you will need to feed your dinner guests: whole bird, 1 pound per person; boneless breast of turkey, 1/2 pound per person; breast of turkey with bone, 3/4 pound per person; and pre-stuffed frozen turkey, 1.25 pounds per person (cook from frozen state).

Thawing in the refrigerator
Place frozen bird in original wrapper in the refrigerator (40 degrees or below). Allow approximately 24 hours per 4- to 5-pound turkey. A thawed turkey can remain in the refrigerator for one to two days.

Thawing in cold water
Submerge the turkey in cold water and change the water every 30 minutes. Allow about 30 minutes defrosting time per pound of turkey. Cook immediately after thawing.

Cooking a frozen turkey!
The Food and Drug Administration Food Code allows this method of cooking and turkey hotlines suggest it. Larger turkeys take 30–50 percent longer to cook than if they were thawed. For a 12- to 13-pound turkey, start 5 to 5.5 hours before you want to serve the cooked turkey. Set oven temperature at 325 degrees. Put the turkey on a rack over a sturdy cookie sheet that has been covered with foil for easy cleanup. (Cooking in a pan
with sides shields the bottom of the turkey from heat, so the bottom will not be uniformly cooked.) The bag with the heart, liver, etc., and the neck, inside the turkey, can be removed after baking about 3 hours. Draw any liquid out of the cavity with a baster and save it for gravy.

The temperature of the meat should be about 165 degrees in about 4.5–5 hours. If not, continue cooking until a thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the thigh and breast registers at least 165 degrees.

Thanksgiving day
Start early. If you choose to stuff your turkey, stuff loosely. The stuffing should be moist, not dry. Place turkey in the oven immediately. You may also cook the stuffing outside the bird in a casserole dish. Judging cooking time for your turkey will be easier if the following chart is used. The times listed are for a fresh or thawed turkey in an oven at 325 degrees. These times are approximate.

Timetables for Turkey Roasting
(325-degree oven temperature)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size of Turkey</th>
<th>Cooking Time Unstuffed</th>
<th>Cooking Time Stuffed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8–12 pounds</td>
<td>2½ – 3 hours</td>
<td>3 – 3½ hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12–14 pounds</td>
<td>3 – 3¾ hours</td>
<td>3½ – 4 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>14–18 pounds</td>
<td>3¾ – 4¼ hours</td>
<td>4 – 4½ hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18–20 pounds</td>
<td>4¼ – 4½ hours</td>
<td>4¼ – 4¾ hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use a food thermometer to check the internal temperature of the turkey. Check the internal temperature in the innermost part of the thigh and wing and the thickest part of the breast. All turkey meat, including any that remains pink, is safe to eat as soon as all parts reach at least 165 degrees. The stuffing should reach 165 degrees, whether cooked inside the bird or in a separate dish. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before carving to allow the juices to flow back into all parts of the turkey.

Storing leftovers
Cut the turkey into small pieces; refrigerate stuffing and turkey separately in shallow containers within two hours of cooking. Use leftover turkey and stuffing within three to four days or freeze these foods. Reheat thoroughly to a temperature of 165 degrees or until hot and steaming.

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