

Planning a Holiday Meal

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Introduction

Planning a holiday meal for many people can be challenging, but if you start at least two weeks early, it can be easier for everyone. To prepare for a big holiday meal, follow these three steps: plan your menu and food items, shop for the meal and safely store the food. While handling food safely might seem like an extra step, it is crucial to prevent foodborne illnesses for you and your guests. Including food safety in your meal planning is quick and straightforward.

Holiday Menu Planning

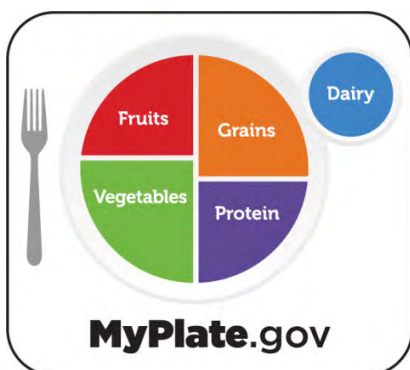


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- Think about the main parts of your holiday meal. You should include a protein, a starch or starchy vegetable and a green vegetable. Using the MyPlate model can help you avoid having too many different dishes.
- Estimate how many guests you will have and how much food you will need by using this equation. This will help reduce food waste and limit spending.

Type of Holiday Dish	Average Amount Eaten Per Adult
Turkey or main protein item	One pound of protein per person
Casseroles and side dishes	1.5 ounces of grains, 4 ounces of vegetables, 5 ounces of potatoes, or 2 ounces of beans per person
Bread	1-2 portions of bread per person
Dessert	1.5 pieces of dessert per person
Salads and soups	1 cup of salad or soup per person

- Keep a copy of the recipes you will use. This ensures you have all the ingredients before shopping. Check each recipe to make things easier.
- See what food items you already have at home, so you don't buy too much.
- Look for digital coupons or sales at grocery stores before the holiday to get the best prices.
- Sharing the meal preparation and costs with other guests can make your workload lighter and save money.
- Coordinate with others to ensure the same dishes aren't brought by different people.



Shopping for the Meal

- Remember the two-hour rule. Food that needs refrigeration or freezing should not be left out at room temperature for more than two hours. If it's hotter than 90 F outside, that time is reduced to one hour.
- Shop at least one week before the holiday in case stores run out of essential holiday items.
- Buy cold and frozen items last during your shopping trip to keep them at the right temperature for as long as possible.
- If you use reusable grocery bags, wash and sanitize them regularly. Studies show these bags can carry bacteria like *Salmonella* or *E. coli* if not cleaned properly.
- If you are running other errands, make sure to go to the grocery store last so that food doesn't sit in your car for too long.
- Check cans for dents, cracks or bulging lids, as these can indicate food safety issues.
- Inspect packages for damage, including tears or openings.

Storing Food for the Holidays

- Keep the two-hour rule in mind when storing food! Get fresh and frozen items into storage as soon as possible.
- Place raw meat on a plate or the bottom shelf of the refrigerator to avoid its juices dripping onto other foods.
- Quickly add frozen items to the freezer. Rotating food based on what was placed in first and using these first can help prevent having freezer burn on older items.

Thawing your Turkey

Thawing a turkey is an essential step for food safety and can be confusing for many. Proper planning is necessary to ensure that your turkey is defrosted and ready for cooking. There are three main methods for thawing a turkey:

1. Refrigerator Thaw Method: This is the recommended method by the USDA and FDA to keep food safe. It takes about 24 hours for every 5 pounds of turkey to thaw in the refrigerator. Place it on the bottom shelf or in a dish to avoid raw juices dripping onto other food.
2. Cold-Water Bath Method: Allow 30 minutes per pound of turkey, changing the water and adding fresh ice often to keep it below 40 F.
3. Microwave Method: Follow the manufacturer's instructions for defrosting large poultry. This method can be unreliable, so use it only if necessary.

References

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