

Top Tips for Christmas

FOOD and COOKING TIPS

From defrosting turkey to using leftovers, these food safety tips will help stop your turkey from knocking the stuffing out of you this Christmas.

Avoid cross-contamination

Keep all raw food, whether it is turkey or vegetables, separate from ready-to-eat foods to avoid [cross-contamination](#).

Use separate chopping boards for raw food and ready-to-eat food.

Raw foods can contain harmful bacteria that are spread very easily to anything they touch, including other foods, worktops, chopping boards and knives.

Set the fridge to 5°C

Store food that needs to be chilled in the fridge until you need it.

Make sure the fridge temperature is below 5°C.

Don't pack food too tightly, as the cold air needs to circulate to cool food down.

If you're storing food such as fresh vegetables outside in a garage or shed, keep them in a sealed container.

Wash your hands

Always wash and dry your hands thoroughly before and after handling food, especially when handling and preparing raw meat and poultry.

You also need to remember to wash and dry your hands after going to the toilet, touching the bin or touching any pets.

Bugs are spread between food, surfaces and utensils most effectively on wet or damp hands.

Defrost turkey safely

Defrost the turkey on a large dish and cover, preferably in the fridge. Remove the giblets and the neck to speed up thawing.

Alternatively, defrost the turkey in a cool, clean place where the temperature is fairly constant.

Keep in mind that the temperature of where the turkey is kept will affect thawing times.

Turkey defrosting times

It can take up to 48 hours for a large turkey to thaw.

To work out the defrosting time for your turkey, check the packaging. If there aren't any defrosting instructions, use the following times as a guide:

- in a fridge at 4°C (39°F), allow about 10 to 12 hours per kg
- in a cool room (below 17.5°C, 64°F), allow approximately three to four hours per kg
- at room temperature (about 20°C, 68°F), allow approximately two hours per kg

A turkey is fully defrosted when there are no ice crystals inside the cavity and the meat is soft when you insert a fork or skewer.

Once thawed, store it in the fridge until you are ready to cook it. If this isn't possible, you should cook it immediately.

Don't wash the bird

Eighty per cent of people say they wash their turkeys before cooking them, but this significantly increases the risk of food poisoning by splashing germs around the kitchen.

Don't wash your bird, because it will only spread germs. Thorough cooking will kill any bacteria that might be present.

Cook turkey properly

Seventeen per cent of people aren't sure how to tell when their turkey is cooked.

Make sure your turkey is steaming hot all the way through before serving.

When you cut into the thickest part of the turkey, none of the meat should be pink.

If juices flow out when you pierce the turkey or when you press the thigh, they should be clear.

If you're using a temperature probe or food thermometer, ensure that the thickest part of the bird (between the breast and the thigh) reaches at least 70°C for two minutes.

Goose and other birds

Other birds, such as goose and duck, have different cooking times and temperatures.

The oven should always be hotter for duck and goose in order to melt the fat under the skin.

- goose should be cooked in a preheated oven at 200°C/425°F/Gas Mark 7 for 35 minutes per kg
- duck should be cooked in a preheated oven for 45 minutes per kg at 200°C/400°F/Gas Mark 6
- chicken should be cooked in a preheated oven at 180°C/350°F/Gas Mark 4 for 45 minutes per kg plus 20 minutes

Wash your veg

Most of the bacteria on vegetables will be in the soil attached to the produce.

Washing to remove any soil is therefore particularly important. When you wash vegetables, don't just hold them under the running tap.

Rub them under water, for example in a bowl of fresh water.

Start with the least soiled items first and give each of them a final rinse.

Washing loose produce is particularly important, as it tends to have more soil attached to it than pre-packaged fruit and vegetables.

Know your dates

Sniffing food is not a reliable way of telling whether food is still safe to eat.

Some harmful bacteria don't always change the way foods smell, taste or look.

Food with a "use-by" date goes off quite quickly and it can be dangerous to eat after this date.

Food with a "best before" date is longer-lasting. It may not be at its best quality after this date but should be safe to eat.

Eggs can be eaten a day or two after their best before date, as long as they are cooked thoroughly until both yolk and white are solid, or if they are used in dishes where they will be fully cooked, such as a cake.

Preparing a buffet

Cold items for a buffet should remain covered and in the fridge until the last minute. Don't keep them out for more than four hours.

Food kept out for longer could be open to harmful bacteria if left to get warm at room temperature. Foods which are cooked and intended to be served cold should be cooled as quickly as possible, ideally within one to two hours. You can cool food down faster by separating it into small batches, placing it in a container and placing the container in a shallow dish of cold water.

Cool leftovers

Cool leftovers as quickly as possible, ideally within 90 minutes, then cover and refrigerate.

Splitting food into smaller portions can help cooling.

Use leftovers within two days and reheat until they are steaming hot all the way through.

Don't reheat leftovers more than once. If you want to keep leftovers longer than two days, you can freeze them instead.

Cool leftovers as described above before putting them in the freezer.

Once defrosted, don't refreeze the leftovers unless you cook them again first.

10 WAYS TO PREVENT FOOD POISONING

The UK has more than 500,000 reported cases of people experiencing food poisoning a year, according to the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

If you've ever had [food poisoning](#), you'll know how unpleasant it can be, even for a fit and healthy person.

Food poisoning can sometimes cause serious illness and even death.

Most people assume that food poisoning comes from restaurants, cafes and fast food outlets, but according to the FSA, you're just as likely to get ill from food prepared at home.

Follow these tips to reduce the risk of food poisoning at home.

Wash your hands

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and hot water, and dry them before handling food, after handling raw foods – including meat, fish, eggs and vegetables – and after touching the bin, going to the toilet, blowing your nose, or touching animals, including pets.

Wash worktops

Wash worktops before and after preparing food, particularly after they've been touched by raw meat, including poultry, raw eggs, fish and vegetables.

You don't need to use antibacterial sprays: hot, soapy water is fine.

Wash dishcloths

Wash dishcloths and tea towels regularly and let them dry before you use them again.

Dirty, damp cloths are the perfect place for germs to breed.

Use separate chopping boards

Use separate chopping boards for raw food and ready-to-eat food.

Raw foods can contain harmful bacteria that spreads very easily to anything they touch, including other foods, worktops, chopping boards and knives.

Keep raw meat separate

It's especially important to keep raw meat away from ready-to-eat foods, such as salad, fruit and bread.

This is because these foods won't be cooked before you eat them, so any bacteria that gets on to the foods won't be killed.

Store raw meat on the bottom shelf

Always cover raw meat and store it on the bottom shelf of the fridge, where it can't touch other foods or drip onto them.

Cook food thoroughly

Cook food thoroughly and check that it's steaming hot all the way through.

Make sure poultry, pork, burgers, sausages and kebabs are cooked until steaming hot, with no pink meat inside.

[Don't wash raw meat including chicken and turkey](#) before cooking, as this risks spreading bacteria around your kitchen.

Freezing raw chicken reduces levels of Campylobacter but does not eliminate it completely.

The safest way to kill all traces of Campylobacter is by cooking chicken thoroughly.

Keep your fridge below 5C

Keep your fridge temperature below 5C.

By keeping food cold, you stop food poisoning bugs growing.

Cool leftovers quickly

If you have cooked food that you're not going to eat straight away, cool it as quickly as possible (within 90 minutes) and store it in the fridge or freezer.

Use any leftovers from the fridge within two days.

Respect 'use by' dates

Don't eat food that's past its 'use by' date even if it looks and smells okay.

'Use by' dates are based on scientific tests that show how quickly harmful bugs can develop in the packaged food.

PREVENT CHRISTMAS INJURIES

More than 80,000 people a year need hospital treatment for injuries such as falls, cuts and burns during the festive period.

During Christmas, your home is likely to be full of people and, in the excitement, accidents can easily happen.

“We want to help people prevent their festivities being cut short by a trip to A&E,” says Sheila Merrill, home safety manager at the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA).

“Our message is that the home should be as safe as necessary, rather than as safe as possible.

With a little more care and forward planning, most accidents could be avoided.”

Kitchen

Hot fat, boiling water and sharp knives make the kitchen one of the most dangerous places during the holiday.

“The Christmas meal is probably the biggest meal most families cook all year. It needs careful planning to avoid injuries,” says Merrill.

Try to keep other people (especially children) out of the kitchen. Avoid alcohol until you've finished cooking, and wipe up spills as soon as they happen, so that people don't slip.

Stairs

Clutter, alcohol and tiredness make the stairs an accident hotspot during Christmas, says Merrill. It's common to fall down steps or stairs after drinking.

“Keep the stairs well lit and free from obstacles, especially if you have guests who could be going up to the bathroom during the night,” she says.

Presents

Typical Christmas Day accidents include parents accidentally stabbing themselves with scissors, which they've used to assemble toys, instead of using a screwdriver.

People often cut themselves with knives when they're opening presents too quickly.

People also trip over toys and electric cables while rushing to try their new computers and other appliances.

“Don’t rush,” says Merrill. “Take time to enjoy the moment.

Have a screwdriver ready for toys that are screwed into packaging.

Clear up the packaging and wrapping paper as you go along, and remember to recycle.”

Christmas trees

Beware of your Christmas tree.

That Norwegian spruce is not as innocent as it looks.

Every year, about 1,000 people are injured by their tree, usually while fixing stars, lights or other decorations to the higher branches, reports the RoSPA.

“Always use a step ladder to put up the decorations and don’t over-reach yourself,” says Merrill.

Buy the correct size tree so you don't have to saw the top off and risk cutting yourself.

Fairy lights

Around 350 people a year are hurt by Christmas tree lights, according to RoSPA.

Injuries include people falling while they're putting them up, children swallowing the bulbs, and people getting electric shocks and burns from faulty lights.

“Test your lights and the wiring before you put them up, as they can deteriorate over the years.

If you have old lights, buy new ones that meet higher safety standards,” says Merrill.

“Don’t overload sockets, as that’s a fire risk.”

Decorations

About 1,000 people a year are hurt when decorating their homes, says RoSPA.

Children bite into glass baubles and adults fall while using unstable chairs instead of ladders to put up streamers, or fall out of lofts while looking for the decorations.

“Glass decorations should be placed out of the reach of toddlers and pets,” says Merrill.

Novelty decorations, such as stuffed Santas, reindeer and snowmen, which look like toys, may not comply with strict toy safety regulations. Therefore, they should not be within the reach of children.

Candles

People are 50% more likely to die in a house fire over Christmas than at any other time of year.

Taking care with candles and oil burners is one way to help you and your family and friends avoid a Christmas house fire.

“Never put candles on or near a Christmas tree,” says Merrill. “Never leave an open flame unattended.

” Always place tea lights inside an appropriate container.

“They have been known to burn through baths and television sets,” she says.

Christmas plants

Mistletoe is poisonous. Its berries contain toxic proteins that slow the heart rate and can cause hallucinations.

The orange berries of the Christmas cherry can cause stomach pains. The Christmas rose is so effective at causing diarrhoea that it was used as a chemical weapon by the ancient Greeks.

“Check with the garden centre whether the plants you’re buying are toxic,” says Merrill. “If they are, keep them out of the reach of children.”

Stress

Christmas is one of the most stressful times of the year.

The combination of drink, relatives, lack of sleep and the stress of Christmas shopping can be too much for some people.

Try to find some time alone, even if it's only to have a relaxing bath. Learn to say no to the demands of relatives.

It's important not to suppress your emotions. Try to talk to someone you trust or a third party, such as the Samaritans. Find out more on [keeping Christmas stress-free](#).

Indigestion and food poisoning

Food poisoning is always a worry at Christmas.

Read the instructions on the turkey well. It takes hours to cook a turkey properly.

If you don't, you could contract salmonella poisoning, which can be life-threatening for vulnerable people.

Find out more on [cooking turkey](#).

Studies by the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF) reveal that, on average, we gain 2kg (5lbs) in weight during the Christmas period, so restrict the amount of chocolate, cakes and nuts you eat.

Get ideas on [healthy Christmas food swaps](#).

Alcohol

Apart from the risks to your own health, alcohol can be the chief mischief maker when it comes to accidents.

“It reduces your risk awareness,” says Merrill. “Alcohol can make people relax so much that they don't think about everyday risks.” [Get tips on cutting down](#).

After a party, empty any alcohol out of glasses.

Children are likely to drink the remains if they get up early to play with their toys. Never drink and drive.

FIVE SAFER SEX TIPS FOR THE PARTY SEASON

This party season, don't find yourself having to deal with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) or an unintended pregnancy.

Make sure you're prepared – have enough of your contraception method to last the festive period, and know where to get help if you need it.

Natika Halil, sexual health charity FPA's director of health and wellbeing, said: "It's not unusual for people to have an accident during the party season because of contraception failure or unprotected sex.

"And we tend to see more teenagers become pregnant in December and January than other months of the year.

"Research has shown that when we drink alcohol we are more likely to do something we regret later, and that we think less about the risks of STIs."

Our five safer sex tips for the festive season will help prevent an accident becoming a crisis.

1. Stock up on your contraception

If you use a method of contraception that you need to take every day, such as the pill, make sure you have enough to last over Christmas, especially if you're going away.

"The classic mistake is to go away and forget to take your contraception with you, or to run out of pills on Christmas Eve," says Halil.

"To avoid this, check when your pill pack is going to run out. If it will run out while you're away, get a new one before you go.

"And if you're using the contraceptive injection, make sure it's up-to-date. Whatever contraception you use, make sure you're organised and have enough to last."

To avoid forgetting your contraception if you go away:

- put it on your list of things to pack
- leave a note for yourself by the front door
- set a reminder on your phone
- write it in your diary
- ask your partner or a friend to remind you

If you don't have a regular method of contraception, such as the [implant](#), [injection](#) or [intrauterine device \(IUD\)](#), consider organising one before the holidays.

Find out about the [different methods of contraception](#).

2. Stock up on condoms

Keep some condoms with you. They're the only form of contraception that protects against both pregnancy and STIs.

Condoms are useful to have in case you have sex with someone new, or if your regular method of contraception fails or runs out.

Vomiting can reduce the effectiveness of the pill. If you're sick, you may need to use condoms to make sure you're protected against pregnancy.

The advice varies for different pills, so check the information leaflet in your pill packet, talk to your doctor or nurse, or see [FPA information on the combined pill](#) and [FPA information on the progestogen-only pill](#).

You can get free condoms from community contraceptive clinics, sexual health or genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics, and some young people's services.

You can buy condoms from pharmacies, supermarkets and vending machines.

Make sure any condoms you use have the CE mark on them. This means they meet European safety standards.

Find [sexual health services near you](#).

3. Know where to get emergency contraception

Emergency contraception can prevent pregnancy if you have had unprotected sex or your regular contraception has failed.

It's better not to rely on emergency contraception as a regular method of contraception as it does not work as well at stopping pregnancies.

There are three methods of emergency contraception – two hormonal pills and the IUD. Despite the common label "morning after pill", none of the methods have to be used straight away or within the first 12 hours to be effective.

The emergency pill Levonelle needs to be used within three days of unprotected sex. The emergency pill EllaOne and the IUD can be used up to five days after unprotected sex.

IUDs must be fitted by a trained doctor or nurse at a clinic or your GP surgery.

If your contraception fails, or you have unprotected sex over Christmas and the local clinics and pharmacies are closed, knowing where to get the emergency hormonal pill or IUD could make all the difference.

Where can I get emergency contraception?

You can get emergency contraception (the IUD and emergency pill) free of charge from community contraceptive clinics, sexual health clinics and some GP surgeries.

You can also get the emergency pill from some:

- genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics
- NHS walk-in centres
- pharmacies (you may have to pay)
- young people's services

Some GP surgeries and clinics may give emergency hormonal contraception in advance so you can take it with you if you go away.

4. Know how to find a clinic

To find a clinic:

- use the NHS Choices [service search](#)
- call the Sexual Health Information Line free on 0300 123 7123
- use [FPA's clinic finder](#)

If you're under 25, you can email Brook via [Ask Brook](#), or you can visit the National Chlamydia Screening Programme website to find out where you can get [tests for chlamydia](#).

Some clinics may be closed during Christmas. Call your local clinic to find out their Christmas opening hours.

You can visit any sexual health or contraceptive clinic in England. Find out the nearest or most convenient one for you and their opening hours over Christmas and New Year, whether you'll be at home or away.

5. Don't panic

Help is available if your contraception fails or you have unprotected sex over the party season.

Even if your nearest clinic or GP surgery is closed, you can go to an NHS walk-in centre or an accident and emergency department.

Some of these can provide emergency contraception and offer advice and testing if you're worried about STIs.

Remember, it's always OK to say no if you don't want to have sex with someone. Nobody has the right to make you go further than you want to.

CHRISTMAS ON YOUR OWN

Ideas for getting into the festive spirit and keeping healthy if you're on your own over Christmas.

If you're on your own over the Christmas break, there's plenty you can do to get into the festive cheer.

With these tips from Mind and a bit of planning, a solo Christmas can be a holiday to enjoy rather than endure.

Keep busy this Christmas

The Christmas season seems to begin earlier every year, but it doesn't have to take over every aspect of your life. Think about what you most enjoy doing, whether it's reading, country walks, going to the cinema or playing the piano. And make time to do it. You could also do new activities that you'd like to try.

Be a volunteer

Many charities and organisations need [help at Christmas](#). If you have spare time, you could spend a few hours working as a volunteer. For information on local volunteering opportunities, visit [Do-it](#).

Do-it lists volunteer positions within 5km of your postcode. Alternatively, ask at your local library or look for adverts in the local paper.

Get your heart pumping

Physical exercise has been proved to reduce stress and enhance your mood. Find something that works for you, whether it's going to the gym, swimming or wrapping up warm and going outside for some fresh air. Just getting off the sofa and going outdoors should make you feel better. [The Ramblers](#) and the [National Trust](#) hold winter-themed activities.

Eat and drink well

Traditional Christmas food and drink can often be excessive and make you feel lethargic. Healthy eating with plenty of fruit and vegetables can give you more energy and improve your general wellbeing. For advice on healthy eating and adding more fruit and vegetables into your diet, see our [Healthy eating](#) section.

Find a listening ear

Christmas is a good time to be sociable, but if you're feeling lonely and your friends are occupied with their families, it can help to speak to someone completely removed from your situation. Some organisations, such as [Mind](#) or the [Samaritans](#) have befriending services and offer confidential support over the phone.