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SMART TOOLS

CHRISTMAS TURKEY TIMETABLE AND COUNTDOWN

Work backwards from dinner time, safely

- ✓ Defrosting times from the Food Standards Agency
- ✓ Oven time worked out for your turkey weight
- ✓ Fill-in timetable for the whole meal
- ✓ Checked against the FSA guidance on 18 October 2026

PLAN AHEAD

Countdown and defrosting

Your turkey's packaging comes first (and if you are cooking a turkey crown, follow the defrosting instructions on its packaging). The Food Standards Agency (FSA) says to check the retailer's instructions on the packaging for defrosting and cooking, and to use its guidance only if there are none.

SUGGESTED COUNTDOWN (OUR SUGGESTION, NOT FROM THE FSA)

☐	4 weeks before: decide how many you are feeding and order your turkey or crown
☐	2 weeks before: clear space in the fridge (bottom shelf) and the freezer
☐	1 week before: write your timetable on page 3 and share out the jobs
☐	Before defrosting: read the label for defrost and cooking instructions

DEFROSTING IF THERE ARE NO INSTRUCTIONS (FSA)

- A whole turkey can take between 3 and 5 days to defrost properly, depending on size
- A typical large turkey of 6-7kg could take as much as 4 days in the fridge
- Defrost in the fridge on the bottom shelf. In a fridge, allow around 10-12 hours per kg

MY DEFROST PLAN

Turkey weight (kg)	Start defrosting on	Fridge shelf cleared?
		☐

Oven time and the dinner timetable

If there are no cooking instructions on the packaging, the FSA gives these times for an oven preheated to **180°C (160°C fan, Gas Mark 4)**:

Turkey weight	FSA time	Example total
Under 4.5kg	45 minutes per kg plus 20 minutes	4 kg: 3 h 20 min
4.5kg to 6.5kg	40 minutes per kg	5.5 kg: 3 h 40 min
Over 6.5kg	35 minutes per kg	7 kg: 4 h 05 min

STUFFING AND COOKING TIMES

The FSA says its cooking guidelines are based on a bird that is not stuffed. Cook the stuffing in a separate roasting tin, not inside the turkey: a stuffed turkey will take longer to cook and may not cook thoroughly.

CHECK IT IS COOKED

Cut into the thickest part: none of the meat should be pink and any juices should run clear. With a probe, the thickest part needs to reach one of: 60°C for 45 minutes, 65°C for 10 minutes, **70°C for 2 minutes**, 75°C for 30 seconds or 80°C for 6 seconds.

WORK BACKWARDS FROM DINNER

Write the time you want to eat, then fill the other rows going back. Use your own recipe and label for every dish except the turkey times above.

Time	Job	Oven / hob	Who

AFTERWARDS

Leftovers and safe reheating

☐	Cool cooked food quickly at room temperature and refrigerate or freeze within one to two hours
☐	Once food has been defrosted, cook and eat it within 24 hours and do not refreeze it
☐	Make sure any defrosted food is reheated until steaming hot
☐	Make sure the turkey is steaming hot and cooked all the way through before serving

SOURCE

Food Standards Agency, 'Christmas food hygiene' on gov.uk, published 11 January 2018 (applies to England, Northern Ireland and Wales). Checked 18 October 2026. If you live in Scotland, check Food Standards Scotland.

LEFTOVERS LOG

Food	Cooled and stored (time)	Fridge or freezer	Use by

NOTES FOR NEXT YEAR

What worked	What I would change

General information only, not professional advice. Facts checked against the pages listed in sources.md on 18 October 2026.
Rules change: check the page before you act.