

## Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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Contact: Steve Todd, Health Officer  
517-279-9561, ext. 148

Theresa Christner, Health Ed./Health Promotion Dir.  
517-279-9561, ext. 144

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### Doing the Turkey Trot!

**Coldwater, MI.** Does cooking Thanksgiving dinner overwhelm you? Are you dreading the holiday dinner ... with all its trappings? Don't let the big day ruffle your feathers! The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers the following tips to help your dinner earn high marks while maintaining low stress.

**One to Two Weeks: Firm up your menu and check your recipes.** This is the perfect time to find the recipes to your family's favorites and to review them. Check to see what ingredients you have on hand and if they have expired. Also check to see which recipes or portions of recipes you can make ahead. After all, serving a multi-course dinner is all about timing. If you have invited guests, you may also want to confirm if they are bringing a dish to pass. **Remember:** expanding your dinner to incorporate others' traditions can spice up your own festivities, blending both new and the old traditions, as well as freeing up time from the kitchen.

**Day 7: Make your shopping list.** Now that you have reviewed your recipes and checked your ingredients, it's time to plan your shopping list. Taking time to make a list ahead helps you save both time and resources, and allows you to shop the bargains and/or limit your purchases to only what you need. It also helps protect you from stocking up on sale items that are perishable or have a short shelf life. Oh by the way, you should probably clean out your refrigerator as well.

**Day 6: Buy your frozen turkey.** If you are purchasing a frozen turkey, you want to be sure to buy it so it has plenty of time to thaw. Small turkeys, those between 5 to 10 lbs. will need 1 to 3 days to thaw in the refrigerator. You can store these in the freezer until later in the week. Large turkeys, those 20 lbs. or more, will need five to six days to properly thaw in the refrigerator.

Refrigerator thawing is the preferred method. Be sure to leave the turkey in its original wrapper and place it in shallow pan that will catch all its juices. If come Thanksgiving, your find your bird is still frozen, you can finish thawing it in cold water, making sure to change the water every half hour. **Never thaw your turkey at room temperature!**

**Day 5: Make pie dough.** If you are the type of cook that makes pie dough, this is a good day to mix up your favorite dough recipe and wrap it in plastic wrap for the night

before. If you use frozen dough, be sure to take it out of the freezer so that it will thawed and pliable for pie making day.

This is also a good day to purchase fresh produce, such as apples and oranges for stuffing the turkey, celery and onions for stuffing and potatoes and sweet potatoes. Once purchased, store perishable fresh fruits and vegetables (like strawberries, lettuce, herbs, and mushrooms) in a clean refrigerator at a temperature of 40°F or below.

**Day 4: Make gravy.** You can use chicken or turkey stock to make your gravy ahead. First, sauté your butter and flour in a pan and then stir in your stock. On Thanksgiving, simply heat your gravy and add your drippings to give the illusion that your gravy was just made.

**Day 3: Prepare root vegetables.** This is a good day to peel and cube your root vegetables – such as carrots, rutabaga, beets and/or squash for casseroles and/or prepare any salad greens. When preparing any fresh produce, begin with clean hands. Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and warm water **before** and **after** preparation. Cut away any damaged or bruised areas on fresh fruits and vegetables before preparing and/or eating. Wash all produce thoroughly under running water. Even if you plan to peel the produce before eating, it is still important to wash it first so dirt and bacteria aren't transferred from the knife onto the fruit or vegetable. Scrub firm produce, such as melons and cucumbers, with a clean produce brush. Dry produce with a clean cloth towel or paper towel to further reduce bacteria that may be present. Greens can be wrapped in a paper towel, placed in a plastic bag and stored in the refrigerator's crisper drawer. And while you are at it, you might as well make your salad dressing on this day.

**Day 2: Pre-cooking.** If you plan to brine your turkey, today is the day. Dry brining is an easy alternative to traditional liquid brining methods. Season the turkey with salt, spices, herbs and even a citrus zest. Store back in the refrigerator in a food-grade plastic bag for the next two days. Prior to cooking, drain the juices from the bag and be sure to rinse the turkey to remove any excess salt. If you are on a sodium restricted diet, skip the brining altogether. Instead, use the day to prepare your stuffing mix and the fillings for pumpkin and/or pecan pies.

**Day 1: Baking.** Pies are always better when they are fresh. Try baking your pies in the evening so they will taste fresh the next day. Also, prepare ahead dough for rolls or fresh baked breads. This is a good time to make jello salads.

**T-Day: Cooking Your Bird!** Make sure your work space is clean. Set the oven temperature no lower than 325°F and be sure the turkey is completely thawed. Remove the packages containing the neck and giblets from neck and body cavities. If you are stuffing the bird, be sure to add just prior to cooking.

Place turkey breast-side up on a flat wire rack in a shallow roasting pan 2 to 2-1/2 inches deep. Cooking times will vary, depending if the bird is stuffed or unstuffed.

Weight	Unstuffed	Stuffed
8 to 12 pounds	2 3/4 to 3 hours	3 to 3 1/2 hours
12 to 14 pounds	3 to 3 3/4 hours	3 1/2 to 4 hours
14 to 18 pounds	3 3/4 to 4 1/4 hours	4 to 4 1/4 hours
18 to 20 pounds	4 1/4 to 4 1/2 hours	4 1/4 to 4 3/4 hours
20 to 24 pounds	4 1/2 to 5 hours	4 3/4 to 5 1/4 hours

Be sure to check the internal temperature by inserting a metal stem thermometer at least 2 inches into the center or thickest part of the meaty portion of the breast, thigh, and wing joint. The food thermometer must reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. If your bird is stuffed, also check the center of the stuffing to make sure it reaches a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Bacteria can survive in stuffing that has not reached 165°F, possibly resulting in foodborne illness. Let the turkey stand 20 minutes before removing all stuffing from the cavity and carving the meat.

Again, once the turkey is cooking, it's time to finish up the remaining items on your menu. **Remember:** bacteria present on raw poultry can contaminate your hands, utensils, and work surfaces as you prepare the turkey. If these areas are not cleaned thoroughly before working with other foods, bacteria from the raw poultry can then be transferred to other foods. So be sure to clean with hot, soapy water: **clean** your hands; **clean** your utensils; and **clean** your sink, cutting boards and counter tops – anything that came in contact with the turkey. This is not the day to contract salmonella!

Time your sides so that they are completed to coincide with your turkey entree. Hot food is always best! Warm up remaining items that were made earlier in the week (i.e., gravy, rolls, casseroles, stuffing, etc.) and throw together last minute items like salads from your prepared greens. Set on the table and enjoy!

By taking time to plan ahead, you can make sure that your food is prepared well, safely and delicious. And you may even have time to catch part of the game.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency would like to wish you and yours a Healthy and Safe Thanksgiving. To view more healthy and helpful food safety tips, check out our website at [www.bhsj.org](http://www.bhsj.org).

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