

Loving Your Thanksgiving Your Leftovers

It's over. All of your guest have enjoyed a good Thanksgiving meal and have now left the dinner table for football and/or a nap.

While you may want to relax and celebrate a successful meal, it is important that you first refrigerate any leftovers within two hours. Prompt storage can prevent pathogenic bacteria that cause foodborne illness from growing on your leftovers. These bacteria can't be smelled or tasted.

Leftovers should be stored in shallow pans or containers to decrease their cooling time. The quicker your leftovers cool, the less time they spend in the food "temperature danger zone 40 to 140 degrees F. You should also cut leftover turkey into smaller pieces to decrease its cooling time.

While you may have cooked the stuffing inside your turkey, it should be stored separately from the turkey in a shallow container.

There are two storages options for your leftovers:

- Storage in the refrigerator: Leftovers are safe for 3 to 4 days in the refrigerator and can be frozen during that time for longer storage.
- Storage in the freezer: Once frozen, all foods are safe forever, as long as your freezer remains 0 degrees F. or below. But for the best quality, use leftovers within 2 to 6 months.

If you allow your guests to take your leftovers home with them, the food will be safe as long as the guests are not traveling more than two hours. If any guests are traveling more than two hours, the leftovers must be kept at 40 degrees or below in a cooler with ice or frozen gel packs.

Whether you are planning to enjoy your leftovers after a long day of shopping or during a weekend of watching football, be sure to follow this tips and all of the other Turkey Tips to keep your food safe and healthy.

You can find more information by visiting http://www.fsis.usda.gov/wps/portal/fsis/topics/food-safety-education/get-answers/food-safety-fact-sheets/poultry-preparation/lets-talk-turkey/CT_Index (Lets Talk Turkey) to learn how to safely plan, thaw and prepare a turkey.

Source: USDA, Foodsafety.gov