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# CHICKEN:

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## CONSUMERS GUIDE TO

- Buying
- Preparing
- Storing
- Serving
- Enjoying



## CHICKEN: AN AMERICAN FAVORITE

Chicken is one of America's most popular foods and tops beef and pork in consumption per capita. Wholesome, tasty chicken is economical, easy to prepare, and a great enjoyment to serve. Chicken is also versatile, and can be cooked in many different ways, either by itself or paired with other foods such as grains, vegetables or fruits. It can be used in appetizers, soups, salads, sandwiches and main dishes. Some cuts of chicken take only minutes to cook and new ready-to-serve chicken can make meal preparation a snap. Additionally, white-meat chicken is one of the lowest-fat protein sources, and leg meat, while a bit higher in fat, provides a rich flavor to any meal. Either type of chicken fits easily into today's recommendations for healthful living.

## CHICKEN CHOICES

Your market probably carries several different types of chicken:

- Broiler-fryer—a young, tender chicken weighing 3 to 5 pounds when sold whole. Most popular cuts are packaged from these chickens.
- Roaster—a 6 to 8 pound chicken; best roasted whole and carved into servings.
- Cornish Game Hen—about 2 pounds; usually sold whole. Best roasted or grilled.
- Stewing Hen—an older hen weighing 5 to 6 pounds; best suited for moist cooking methods like braising and stewing.
- Capon—a neutered male chicken weighing 8 to 10 pounds; very meaty and tender.

Chicken is packaged in many ways to save you time. You can purchase it whole, cut into parts, or in packs of similar individual parts, such as breasts, drumsticks, leg quarters, wings or thighs. Boneless, skinless breasts or thighs have no waste, save preparation time, and are great for creating low-fat dishes. And convenience products such as uncooked, recipe-ready marinated chicken are growing in popularity and availability. Examples include:

- Seasoned or marinated fresh chicken parts, ready to go on the grill, or to use in fajitas or stir-fry recipes
- Frozen fried chicken pieces, breasts and breast tenders
- Barbecued or hot and spicy wings
- Chicken nuggets
- Prepackaged chicken slices for sandwiches
- Rotisserie or roasted whole chicken
- Ground chicken
- Precooked breasts, strips or diced cubes

## Chicken To Go

For those looking for great taste and the ultimate in convenience, newer products such as precooked boneless chicken strips, breasts and chunks, whole roasted chicken, and sliced prepackaged chicken are lifesavers for the home cook. These are delicious added to pastas, salads, casseroles, sandwiches and other dishes.

## Show a Little Leg

Many people prefer the white meat of the chicken, but the leg meat offers as much versatility and rich flavor. Chicken leg meat—the legs, thighs and drumsticks—has a wonderful flavor, works great in all types of cooking. Leg meat is also a great value and is packaged in a variety of offerings.

## LOOK AT THE LABEL

The labels on packages of chicken are filled with important information:

- The nutrition facts panel displays the amount of calories, fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, protein and other important nutrients such as vitamins and minerals in a serving of chicken. Many retailers will also have this information available on posters and in brochures where chicken products are sold. For more complete nutrition information, visit the USDA website at <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/databases.html>.
- The package weight helps determine how much chicken to buy—a pound of raw bone-in, skin-on chicken serves 2 to 3 people, while a pound of raw, boneless, skinless breasts or thighs serves up to four.
- A “sell by” date means that the package should not be sold after that date; be sure to cook the chicken within 2 to 3 days of purchase unless the chicken is frozen. A package of raw chicken with a “use by” date should be cooked or frozen by that date, and a package of cooked chicken should be eaten by the “use by” date.

Safe handling and cooking tips also appear on the package.

Look for this label on fresh meat and poultry:

### Safe Handling Instructions

*This product was prepared from inspected and passed meat and/or poultry. Some food products may contain bacteria that could cause illness if the product is mishandled or cooked improperly. For your protection, follow these safe handling instructions.*



Keep refrigerated or frozen.  
Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.



Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods.  
Wash working surfaces (including cutting boards), utensils, and hands with soap and water after touching raw meat or poultry.



Cook thoroughly.  
Use a meat thermometer.



Keep hot foods hot.  
Refrigerate leftovers immediately or discard.

## NUTRITION NEWS

Looking for chicken on the Food Guide Pyramid? You'll find it in the Meat (beef, veal, pork, lamb), Poultry (chicken, duck, pheasant, goose, turkey), Fish, Dry Beans, Eggs and Nuts Group,

with other foods that supply protein, iron and important vitamins and minerals. The good news is that chicken is one of the lowest in calories, fat and saturated fat.

### NUTRITION INFORMATION PER 3-OUNCE BONELESS, COOKED PORTION

FOOD ITEM	Calories	Total Fat (g)	Saturated Fat (g)	Cholesterol (mg)	Protein (g)
Filet of sole, baked	100	1.5	0.5	60	20
<b>Chicken breast, no skin, baked</b>	120	1.5	0.5	70	24
<b>Chicken drumstick, no skin, baked</b>	130	4.0	1.0	80	23
<b>Chicken wing, no skin, baked</b>	150	6	1.5	70	23
Salmon, baked	160	7.0	1.0	60	22
<b>Chicken breast, with skin, baked</b>	170	7.0	2.0	70	25
Beef sirloin steak, trimmed of visible fat, broiled	180	9.0	3.0	75	25
<b>Chicken drumstick, with skin, baked</b>	180	9.0	3.0	75	23
Pork loin rib chop, trimmed of visible fat, lean only	180	9.0	3.0	60	24
Canned cured ham, 13% fat, roasted	190	13.0	4.0	55	17
Lamb chop, trimmed of visible fat, broiled	200	12.0	6.0	70	22
Beef tenderloin, trimmed of visible fat, broiled	200	11	4	72	23
Beef, ground, extra lean, broiled, well done	225	13.0	5.0	85	24

Source: *Nutri-Facts* Fresh Food Labeling Program, 1995 and USDA Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, Release 14, 2001.

## NUTRITION MYTHS & TRUTHS

**Myth** *To cut fat and calories, chicken should be cooked without the skin.*

**Truth** A thin membrane between the skin and the flesh holds moisture in the meat while keeping the fat out. So, remove the skin from the chicken after cooking instead of before cooking to get juicy flavor with less fat.

**Myth** *It's important to pick meats and poultry with the least amount of cholesterol.*

**Truth** Meats, poultry and other animal products have about the same amount of cholesterol, which by itself does not increase blood levels. Choose those that are lowest in saturated fat like chicken, fish, and lean cuts of other meats, since a diet high in saturated fat may contribute to high cholesterol levels in the body.

**Myth** *White meat chicken is healthier than leg meat.*

**Truth** White meat is lower in fat and calories than leg meat, but skinless leg meat is still lower in fat than some cuts of red meat. Also, leg meat supplies more iron than white meat and often provides more flavor.

**Myth** *Yellow-skinned chicken has more fat than lighter skinned chicken.*

**Truth** Differences in skin color are caused by different feeds. Skin color does not affect nutritional value, flavor, tenderness or fat content.

**Myth** *A healthy diet has no meat or chicken.*

**Truth** A well-balanced diet includes a variety of foods and follows the Food Guide Pyramid. A total of 5 to 7 ounces a day of foods from the Meat Group (meat, poultry, fish, dry beans, eggs and nuts) supplies protein for building and maintaining muscle, iron for healthy blood and other essential vitamins and minerals.

**Myth** *Darkening around the bones is a sign of spoilage in cooked chicken.*

**Truth** Darkening is from natural pigment that seeps through the bones during cooking. It contains iron and is safe to eat.

## STORAGE TIPS

Proper wrapping and storage help keep raw cooked chicken at top quality.

- Refrigerate fresh chicken in its original package on a low shelf, in a cold part of the refrigerator for up to 2 days. Freeze uncooked chicken if it will not be used within that time. Use a refrigerator and freezer thermometer.
- For extra protection, place chicken in a plastic bag to separate it from other foods and to prevent it from dripping onto other items in the refrigerator.
- When freezing, wrap parts separately in foil or other freezer wrap. This makes it easy to defrost only the amount you need. Proper wrapping prevents "freezer burn," which results from contact with air.
- Wrap cooked chicken well before storing in the refrigerator or freezer.

The following guidelines show how long you can safely store raw and cooked chicken. To ensure it is at highest quality, storage longer than these times is not recommended.

	Refrigerator (40°F)	Freezer (0°F)
Raw chicken parts	1-2 days	9 months
Raw chicken giblets, ground chicken	1-2 days	3-4 months
Raw whole chicken	1-2 days	1 year
Cooked chicken parts, not in broth or gravy	3-4 days	4 months
Cooked whole chicken	3-4 days	4 months
Cooked ground chicken	1-2 days	1-3 months

## COOKING CHICKEN

Chicken is versatile and can be cooked in many healthful ways:

- Boneless, skinless breasts or thighs work well with quick, low-fat cooking methods like stir-frying and grilling. Boneless, skinless thighs are also suitable for dishes with long cooking times, as leg meat does not dry out as quickly as white meat.
- Use a nonstick pan or cooking spray instead of adding fat to prevent sticking.
- To add flavor, rub chicken parts with ground spices and herbs or marinate before cooking. Another option is to use the new premarinated chicken products. Either way, be sure to discard the marinade or boil for at least one minute before serving with the cooked chicken.
- Chicken parts can be roasted, baked, oven-fried, or grilled, preferably on a rack to allow fat to drip off the chicken during cooking.
- Use skinless parts in casseroles for added flavor with little fat.
- A flavorful broiler-fryer or stewing chicken is best for soup; allow enough time to chill the soup and remove the surface fat before reheating and serving.
- When grilling chicken, think leg meat. These pieces contain a little more fat than the white meat, making them better able to withstand the intense heat of the grill. When grilling chicken parts, the various pieces will vary in the amount of time needed to be fully cooked, because part size and thickness affects time needed to thoroughly cook the meat. Check for doneness with a meat thermometer.
- Microwave cooking can be used in conjunction with grilling. Raise the temperature of chicken in the microwave until juices are flowing from the meat, and then transfer to the grill to complete the cooking process.

Cooking times for chicken will also vary depending on the appliance and method of cooking used. However, an approximate cooking time for a whole chicken can be calculated as follows. If the whole chicken is unfrozen without the neck and giblets in the body cavity, not stuffed, and placed in a preheated oven at 350° F, the cooking time will be 20 minutes per pound of chicken plus 10 minutes for chickens weighing between one pound and six pounds. For chickens over six pounds, the extra 10 minutes is usually not required. As an example, a 3 1/2 pound chicken would take (3 1/2 pounds times 20 minutes = 70 minutes plus ten minutes) one hour and 20 minutes. For parts, especially thin parts such as boneless, skinless breasts, the cooking time will be less than for a whole carcass chicken of the same weight.

Check chicken for doneness before serving. Insert a meat thermometer into a thick section of the thigh without touching the bone. The internal temperature should reach 180° F for whole chickens or leg meat parts; 170° F for bone-in breast; and 160° F for skinless, boneless breast. Coarsely and finely ground chicken should reach at least 165° F. Stuffing inside a whole chicken should reach a temperature of at least 165° F; stuffing a 4-pound chicken with traditional bread-based ingredients will add an additional 30 minutes or so to the total cooking time. If you do not have a meat thermometer, cook the stuffing separately.

To check for doneness without a thermometer, pierce the thickest part of the chicken with a fork. It should feel tender and juices should run clear.

Chicken cuts should reach at least the temperatures in the chart below to ensure proper doneness.

### Poultry doneness temperatures and cooking times when starting with fresh or thawed chickens, not frozen, in oven preheated to 350°F

Chicken	Internal Temperature	Approximate Cooking Time (350°F), Per Pound	Approximate Grilling Time
Leg quarters, Bone-in	170°F	15 - 20 minutes	15 - 20 minutes/side
Thigh, Bone-in	170°F	15 - 20 minutes	15 - 20 minutes/side
Thigh, Boneless	160°F	10 - 15 minutes	10 - 15 minutes/side
Breast, Bone-in	170°F	15 - 20 minutes	15 - 20 minutes/side
Breast, Boneless	160°F	10 - 15 minutes	10 - 15 minutes/side
Ground Chicken	165°F	10 - 15 minutes	10 - 15 minutes/side
Whole Chicken,	180°F		1 - 3 hours on Revolving Spit
3-4 lb (broiler)		1 1/4 - 1 1/2 hours	
5-7 lb (roaster)		1 1/2 - 2 1/4 hours	

## POULTRY SAFETY

### Washing Wisdom

Like other raw foods, chicken should be handled with care to minimize the risk of foodborne illness. Most foodborne illness in the home is caused by:

- Storing foods at room temperature
- Cooking or reheating at too low a temperature or for too short a time
- Keeping cooked foods at room temperature for too long
- Improper hand washing
- Using the same utensils and serving dishes for raw foods

Proper washing of hands and utensils is a crucial step in the prevention of food-related illness. Wash hands with warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds immediately before starting to cook, as well as between cooking tasks, particularly those steps that involve the handling of raw meat and poultry. Always use a clean towel to dry hands. Use separate cutting boards for raw meats and cooked meats or vegetables and fruits. Wash utensils with hot, soapy water after each use and allow to dry completely. Cutting boards should be rinsed often with a diluted chlorine bleach solution (1 tablespoon household bleach per 1 quart water).

### Poultry Preparation

Poultry should be kept refrigerated until cooking time, or until serving time if using a precooked product. Defrost frozen chicken in the refrigerator, allowing up to 9 hours to defrost parts and about 24 hours to defrost a whole 4-pound chicken. Do not let raw poultry juices drip onto other foods in the refrigerator. If time is short, place poultry in an airtight bag in cold water for at least 2 hours (changing water every 30 minutes to keep it cold), or defrost in a microwave oven and cook immediately. Individually wrapped parts can be cooked straight from the freezer; be sure to allow about 50 percent more time for cooking. Rinsing chicken before cooking is a matter of personal choice, but if chicken is rinsed, scrub the sink with hot soapy water afterwards.

Because bacteria in raw foods can contaminate cooked foods, it is important to keep the two separated. Wash thoroughly with soap and water any bowls or platters that held raw chicken before using them for other items. Discard raw poultry marinades or boil them for at least one minute before serving with cooked chicken or vegetables. Or, make a double batch of marinade and reserve some for serving.

### Cooking, Serving & Storing

A basic food safety rule: Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Most disease-causing bacteria are killed at temperatures above 140° F. Recommended cooking temperatures are high to allow for proper doneness. Bacteria are not killed at temperatures below 40° F, but low temperatures slow their growth. Refrigerator temperature should never be set higher than 40° F.

Cook foods completely in one session. Partial cooking may allow surviving bacteria to grow. Chicken should always be cooked to "well done." Two tests for doneness: pierce the chicken with a fork; the juices should run clear. And check the color of the meat -- it should be opaque throughout.

Most foods, including most chicken dishes, should not be held at temperatures between 40° F and 140° F for more than 2 hours, including serving time and time cooling in the refrigerator. Foods kept in a chafing dish that is hotter than 140° F can be held for about 4 hours. To chill cooked foods as quickly as possible, place them in a covered shallow pan or container in the refrigerator or freezer immediately after the meal is finished. Use leftovers within 2 - 4 days. Reheat leftovers to at least 165° F throughout.

### Picnic Pointers

Chicken -- particularly fried or grilled, or slices of pre-cooked rotisserie-style, is delicious at a picnic. Here are some tips for safe travel:

- Pack raw poultry in a sealed container or bag in a cooler with ice or cold packs, ensuring that the temperature stays below 40° F. Keep the poultry at the bottom of the cooler so that the juices do not leak onto other foods.
- Keep uncooked chicken and meats in a cooler until ready to cook.
- On days when the temperature is above 80°, cooked foods should be kept out for no longer than one hour.
- When bringing a bag lunch, wrap foods well and keep them either cold with a freezer pack or frozen juice carton, or hot in an insulated container.
- Keep coolers and lunch bags in the shade, out of direct sunlight. Pack coolers in the car, not in the trunk.



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For more information and chicken recipes,  
visit the Web site [www.eatchicken.com](http://www.eatchicken.com).

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Dietetic Association ([www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org)).