

## News Release

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### Pink Color of Cooked Poultry

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The color pink in cooked turkey meat raises a "red flag" to many diners and cooks. Conditioned to be wary of cooked fresh pork that looks pink, they question the safety of cooked poultry and other meats that have a rosy blush.

The color of cooked meat and poultry is not always a sure sign of its degree of doneness. Only by using a food thermometer can one accurately determine that a meat has reached a safe temperature. Turkey, fresh pork, ground beef or veal can remain pink even after cooking to temperatures of 160°F and higher. The meat of smoked turkey is always pink.

To understand some of the causes of "pinking" or "pinkening" in fresh turkey, it's important to know first what gives meat its natural color.

**Why is poultry lighter in color than beef?** The protein myoglobin is the major pigment found in all vertebrates and can exist in various forms which determine the resulting meat color. The major reason that poultry meat is much lighter in color than beef is that it is dramatically lower in myoglobin. Also, as an animal becomes older, its myoglobin content usually increases. Turkeys today are young — 4 to 5 months old at the time of slaughter.

**Why are white and dark meat of poultry different colors?** The pink, red or white coloration of meat is due primarily to oxygen-storing myoglobin which is located in the muscle cells and retains the oxygen brought by the blood until the cells need it. To some extent, oxygen use can be related to the bird's general level of activity: muscles that are exercised frequently and strenuously — such as the legs — need more oxygen, and they have a greater storage capacity than muscles needing little oxygen. Turkeys do a lot of standing around, but little if any flying, so their wing and breast muscles are white; their legs, dark.

**What causes well-done meat to be pink?** Scientists have found that pinkness occurs when gases in the atmosphere of a heated gas or electric oven react chemically with meat tissues to give poultry a pink tinge. They are the same substances that give red color to smoked hams and other cured meats.

**How to test for doneness.** The best way to be sure a turkey — or any meat — is cooked safely and done is to use a food thermometer. If the temperature of the turkey as measured in the thigh has reached 180°F and is done to family preference, all the meat — including any that remains pink — is safe to eat.

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