

Are YOU guilty of the 12 Festive Food Fails?

It's the most wonderful time of the year – unless you're one of the thousands of us who'll spend Christmas time hunched over the toilet instead of tucking into turkey.

[New research](#) reveals we're a nation of festive food gamblers, with large numbers likely to take risky kitchen shortcuts that could leave themselves, family and friends seriously ill over the holidays. And for some people – like pregnant women, those with weakened immune systems and older people – the risks are even greater.

The Food Standards Agency's (FSA) Christmas campaign exposes the alarming blunders happening in kitchens across the country – and the results suggest many of us are playing roulette with our Christmas dinner.

FSA's recent survey of over 2,100 adults has revealed the following kitchen blunders:

Turkey terror: A staggering 62% would defrost meat or poultry such as turkey or beef at room temperature (e.g. on the worktop on a plate) instead of in the fridge – creating a bacterial breeding ground that could spell disaster.

Use-by-date dangers: More than half (51%) would eat dairy products (e.g. cream, soft cheese, or dessert) past their use-by date just because they 'look, taste and smell fine' – but deadly bacteria like listeria can't be seen, tasted or smelt.

The four-hour food fail: More than a third (36%) say they'd still eat food that's been sitting out for over four hours with no chilling, letting harmful bacteria grow.

Leftover lottery: One in six (16%) would not cool leftovers at room temperature and then refrigerate or freeze them within one to two hours.

Allergy amnesia: A worrying third (30%) would not ask dinner guests about allergies or dietary requirements before serving up – a potentially life-threatening oversight that's risen from 22% last year.

The half-baked gamble: One in seven (14%) would partially cook food (e.g. turkey or stuffing) in advance and leave it sitting at room temperature to 'finish later' – a recipe for food poisoning.

"Don't let bad kitchen habits ruin Christmas. These common mistakes can lead to food poisoning, which can be serious for children, pregnant women, elderly people and anyone with a weakened immune system. The good news? A few simple food safety steps will keep everyone safe and let you enjoy the festivities."

Rebecca Sudworth, Director of Policy at the Food Standards Agency

The 12 Festive Food Fails – how many are you guilty of?

1. **The Worktop Defrost** – Leaving poultry (e.g. turkey) or meat to defrost at room temperature (e.g. on the worktop on a plate) instead of in the fridge (62%).

2. **The Dairy Date Gamble** – Eating dairy products (e.g. cream, cheese, or desserts) past use-by dates because they still look, taste and smell fine (51%).
3. **The Cold Meat Chance** – Eating smoked fish or cold meats past use-by dates because they still look, taste and smell fine (37%).
4. **The Buffet Blunder** – Leaving food out at room temperature (e.g. for a buffet) for 4+ hours (36%).
5. **The Allergy Amnesia** – Not asking guests about allergies and dietary requirements (30%)
6. **The Leftover Lapse** – Letting leftovers sit for hours at room temperature instead of cooling them and getting them in the fridge or freezer within 1-2 hours (16%)
7. **The Half-Baked Hazard** – Partially cooking food in advance, then leaving it out at room temperature before finishing it off later (14%)
8. **The Pink Turkey Gamble** – Not following cooking instructions properly and checking to make sure your turkey is cooked thoroughly.
9. **The Unwashed Utensil** - Reusing knives or utensils used for raw meat and other foods without cleaning thoroughly them first.
10. **The Forgotten Fridge Check** – Not knowing if your fridge is below 5C.
11. **The Week-Old Leftover** – Keeping Christmas dinner remains for more than two days.
12. **The Warm Storage** – Putting hot leftovers straight into the fridge without cooling first.

Easy fixes to save your festive feast

- **Defrost safely** – Defrost turkey or meat in the fridge – never the worktop. Don't cook until fully defrosted.
- **Respect use-by dates** – They're about safety, not quality.? Don't eat food past its use-by date.
- **Cool it quickly** – Get leftovers in the fridge within two hours max.
- **Check allergies** – Always ask guests before you start cooking and check the ingredients list.
- **Keep it cold** – Buffet food shouldn't sit out for more than four hours.
- **Cook it properly** – Use the right temperature and cooking times to kill harmful bacteria. Make sure food is piping hot through the centre, not just the surface.

For more festive food safety tips, visit [food.gov.uk](https://www.food.gov.uk).

About the Consumer Insights Tracker

The [Consumer Insights Tracker](#) (CIT) is the FSA's monthly tracking survey that monitors changes in consumers' behaviour and attitudes in relation to food.

Each month, the survey is conducted with approximately 2,100 adults (aged 16 or over) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland who are signed up to YouGov's online survey panel. The sample is structured to be representative of the England, Wales and Northern Ireland population by the key demographics of age, gender, region, social grade and education level.

In November 2025, respondents were asked how likely they would be to engage in certain behaviours when preparing food for others (e.g., during festive or special occasions). Figures show the proportion of respondents who said they are likely (very/likely) or unlikely (unlikely/very unlikely) to do each behaviour.

The CIT report is published quarterly and complements the FSA's official statistic Food and You2 survey which collects more comprehensive data on an annual basis, providing longer term monitoring of consumer behaviour and attitudes over time.

To find out more

The next quarterly report covering findings from October to December 2025 will be published in January 2026.