

Turkey. It's what's for dinner... and lunch, and snacks, and...

You're starting to see them everywhere, a reminder of Thanksgiving and Christmas, family and friends, traditions, and holiday celebrations; plump and juicy, bronzed to perfection, adorned with fresh herbs and stuffing, the centerpiece of every happy home—The Turkey.

Benjamin Franklin wanted the turkey to be the national bird stating, "For my own part I wish the bald eagle had not been chosen the representative of our Country... For the truth the turkey is, in comparison, a much more respectable bird, and withal a true original native of America..." Lucky for us, we resolved not to endorse the admittedly "vain and a little silly" turkey for our national emblem of power, bravery, and freedom. It wouldn't look so good if we sat down with our children to eat the national bird for special occasions or have a brown sack lunch of national bird on whole wheat with lettuce and tomato. Even so, this beloved bird has been adopted as a symbol of American traditions etched in our hearts and illustrated time and again. Turkeys are the focus in almost every Christmas classic, like the "just a little dry" Griswold turkey from *Christmas Vacation* or the disappearing turkey in *A Christmas Story*. Then there's NFL announcer, John Madden, who is notorious for overzealously highlighting, marking and circling with yellow, his favorite turkeys during the traditional Thanksgiving Day Dallas Cowboy game. However, this American native bird should not be savored just for holiday feasts, but should be incorporated into our favorite daily dishes the whole year through.

With many now mindful of heart health, a diet low in sodium and cholesterol has become a priority. Compared with other meats, turkey has fewer calories, less fat, less cholesterol, and very little sodium, but it is high in protein, vitamins, and minerals. A rich source of muscle building protein, each 3oz serving of white meat is made up of an average 26 grams of lean protein. As shown in the chart below, the skin contains the majority of the fat and can add as much as 6 extra grams of saturated fat per serving. Dark meat is also higher in fat at about 6 grams of fat per 3oz serving compared to the low-fat white meat.

Serving size equals 3oz or size of a deck of cards

Type of Meat, 3oz.	Calories	Total Fat	Protein
Turkey Breast (skinless, roasted)	115	0.6	26
Turkey Breast (with skin, roasted)	161	6.3	24
Turkey Dark Meat (skinless, roasted)	159	6.1	24
Turkey Leg (with skin, roasted)	177	8.3	24

\*Hormel Foods

Turkey is also high in energy producing vitamin B3 (niacin) and B6 (pyridoxine). The selenium in turkey aids in thyroid hormone metabolism, antioxidant defense systems, and immune function. Phosphorus, potassium, zinc, and iron are also major contributors to making the turkey so nutritious. As if all that isn't enough, meat fiber in turkey is easier to digest than other meats, which makes it a good choice for individuals who may have digestive problems.

So when your favorite aunt offers you leftover Thanksgiving turkey, say "YES", but don't get stumped into thinking that turkey can only be eaten as a whole bird. Grocery stores now offer skinless turkey breasts & cutlets, lean ground turkey, lean turkey bacon and even lean turkey sausage.

Have a healthful turkey recipe you'd like to share on the FT4L website? Contact us here and we'll be sure that everyone has a new idea for that leftover American bird.

*Note: Many Thanksgiving foods are in good company with the turkey and can be part of a wholesome meal. Some of these delicious and nutritious Thanksgiving stand-bys include cranberries, green beans and sweet potatoes. Two words: Portion Control. The key is not to overeat. Enjoy the day with thanks, but don't make unhealthy eating a new habit.*