

Grilling Basics

Everyone can feel good about grilling, a naturally lowfat method of dry heat cookery for their favorite meats, by monitoring heat levels and doneness, and following a few simple and safe tips:

Savor the Flavor - Marinades add flavor to meat and poultry and can tenderize less tender cuts of meat. In addition, marinades with little or no sugar may help protect meat from charring and have also been shown to reduce HCA formation.

- Before cooking, remove meat from marinade and pat dry with a paper towel to promote even browning and prevent steaming.
- Sugary sauces and glazes can burn easily and cause charring. If using these types of products, baste during the last few minutes of grilling and avoid charring.

The Heat is On... Medium! Use medium heat while cooking to ensure delicious, flavorful meat. High heat can overcook or char the outside of meat while the interior remains underdone.

- Charcoal grilling: Medium heat is achieved when coals are no longer flaming, and are ash-covered and spread in a single layer.
- Check cooking temperature by cautiously holding the palm of your hand above the coals at cooking height. Count the number of seconds you can hold your hand in that position before the heat forces you to pull it away; approximately 4 seconds for medium heat.
- Gas grilling: Consult the owner's manual for specific information about preparing the grill for medium heat since gas grill brands vary greatly.

Determine Doneness. Lean meat's tender, juicy texture is optimum when cooked to the proper doneness. For steaks, this is medium rare (145°F) to medium (160°F). For burgers, an instant-read thermometer is the only way to ensure that your ground beef is cooked to the proper temperature of 160°F – color and juices don't tell the whole story.

- Insert an instant-read thermometer horizontally into the side of burgers and steaks to check temperature.
- Place the thermometer in the thickest part or center of the burger or steak. For steaks, the thermometer should not touch bone, fat or the grill.

Go Lean. There are 29 beef cuts that meet government guidelines for "lean" with less than 10 grams of total fat, 4.5 grams or less of saturated fat and less than 95 milligrams of cholesterol per 3-ounce cooked serving and 100 grams.

- Choose from traditional favorites like flank, tenderloin and T-bone steaks, as well as 95% lean ground beef.

Heterocyclic amines (HCAs)

Cooking protein-rich foods like meat, poultry and fish at very high temperatures can create chemicals that some scientists hypothesize may increase cancer risk. However, the potential risks to human health are inconclusive.

Heterocyclic amines (HCAs) are compounds of protein that form on charred meats. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are compounds of fat drippings that form when meat is cooked over open flames and produces smoke. HCA and PAH formation can occur in any protein (poultry, meat or fish) that is charred or overcooked with any cooking method at very high temperatures.