

# FACT SHEET: Using a Meat Thermometer



Using a meat thermometer is the only reliable way to ensure safety and to determine the "doneness" of meat, poultry, and egg products. To be safe, foods must be cooked to an internal temperature high enough to destroy harmful bacteria such as *Salmonella* and *E. coli O157:H7*.

A meat thermometer can help you:

- Prevent foodborne illness;
- Cook and hold food at a safe temperature; and
- Prevent overcooking.

<b>Selecting a Meat Thermometer</b>	<p>Make sure the thermometer is designed for meat and poultry – not for candy or other foods. Meat thermometers come in several types and styles, and vary in level of technology and price.</p> <p><b>Types of Thermometers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Oven-proof types</b> go into the food at the <b>beginning of the cooking time</b> and can be read easily. Most have a dial and thick stem which senses the temperature of food at least 2 inches thick.</li> <li>▪ <b>Instant-read types</b> cannot go into the oven, but give you a quick reading when inserted into the food <b>after removal from the oven</b>. These may have a dial or digital readout and are the best option to use when grilling. Most digitals can read accurately when inserted into the food only ½-inch.</li> <li>▪ <b>Microwave-safe types</b> are designed <b>ONLY for use in microwave ovens</b>.</li> <li>▪ <b>Thermocouple thermometers</b> are considered the <b>fastest and most precise</b>, thus they are the thermometer of choice for laboratories, food service, and food inspectors. A thermocouple uses thin wires in the tips of the probe.</li> </ul>		
<b>Tips on Using a Meat Thermometer</b>	<p>A meat thermometer must be inserted properly to be an accurate indicator of temperature. The sensing area of thermometers is ½ inch to 2 inches long, and this area must be completely immersed in the deepest area of the food.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Ground meat and poultry</b> - place in the thickest area of meat loaf; insert sideways in thin items such as patties.</li> <li>▪ <b>Red meat, roasts, steaks or chops</b> - insert in the center of the thickest part, away from bone, fat, and gristle.</li> <li>▪ <b>Poultry</b> - insert in the inner thigh area near the breast of the bird, but not touching bone.</li> <li>▪ <b>Casseroles and egg dishes</b> - insert in the center or thickest area.</li> <li>▪ Hot, cooked foods must remain at 140° F or higher; cold foods, at 40°F or below.</li> </ul> <p>Most meat thermometers are accurate to within plus or minus 1 to 2° F. Always check cooked meat and poultry in several places with a meat thermometer to ensure food safety.</p>		
<b>Cleaning a Meat Thermometer</b>	<p>As with any cooking utensil, food thermometers should be thoroughly sanitized with hot soapy water after each use.</p>		
<b>USDA Recommended Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures</b>	<p>Foods must reach these minimum internal temperatures to be considered safe and done, no matter how you prepare them.</p>	<b>Recommended Internal Temperatures</b>	
<td style="text-align: center;">Ground Beef</td> <td style="text-align: center;">160 °F</td>		Ground Beef	160 °F
<td style="text-align: center;">Beef Roasts and Steaks</td> <td style="text-align: center;">145 °F</td>		Beef Roasts and Steaks	145 °F
<td style="text-align: center;">Pork</td> <td style="text-align: center;">160 °F</td>		Pork	160 °F
<td style="text-align: center;">Poultry</td> <td style="text-align: center;">165 °F</td>	Poultry	165 °F	
<b>Additional Resources for Food Safety Information</b>	<p><b>USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline:</b> For food safety questions on topics including safe storage and handling of food, safe preparation, product dating, product content and more. The hotline is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. EST time on weekdays year round.  <b>Call toll-free:</b> 888-MPHotline (888-674-6854)  <b>Email:</b> <a href="mailto:mphotline.fsis@usda.gov">mphotline.fsis@usda.gov</a>  <b>Online:</b> <a href="http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/Thermy/index.asp">http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/Thermy/index.asp</a></p> <p><b>Beef Industry Food Safety Council:</b> <a href="http://www.bifsc.org/AboutBIFSCo.aspx">http://www.bifsc.org/AboutBIFSCo.aspx</a></p> <p><b>Safe &amp; Savory at 160°:</b> <a href="http://www.safeandsavory160.com/">http://www.safeandsavory160.com/</a></p>		

Sources: United States Department of Agriculture.