

Healthy Grilling Tips

Do you like your grilled steaks extra well done? Then please read on.... These early summer days stir up an urge to be and do as many things outside as possible. And that means it's time to dust off that grill, stock up on fire fuel and pull out those favorite recipes. Summer belongs to the backyard barbecue, and for good reason. Grilling outside helps us reunite with neighbors, friends and family. It keeps our houses cool and our bellies happy. Plus, grilling is one of the healthiest methods of cooking, or so we think. I don't mean to point out the fly in the potato salad, but some reports do show a correlation between grilled foods and a higher risk of developing cancer.

But don't roll that grill out to the curb yet. Grilling can be a nutritious method of cooking, and with some precautions, it can also be a healthy and safe way to cook, too. The secret lies in not overcooking your food. Turns out, burnt food doesn't just signal bad news for your taste buds, it can also mean bad news for your cancer risk as well.

At high temperatures, compounds in grilled meat, poultry and fish are converted into chemicals called heterocyclic amines (HCA's) which have been linked to a number of cancers. This also holds true for cooking these same foods at high temperatures using broilers and fryers.

Also, the smoke generated when fat and juices drip on the hot coals or rocks can contain polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs), another potential cancer causing chemical. As the smoke rises up past the food it can deposit PAHs on the surface of the meat.

Following these simple procedures can make grilling a safer procedure:

- * Select low-fat cuts of meat and trim away excess fat. Remove poultry skin to prevent fat from falling on coals and causing flames to flare.**
- * Choose smaller cuts of meat, like kabobs, as they take less time to cook.**
- * Try grilling your favorite vegetables or fruits. They do not contain the protein that forms harmful HCAs.**
- * Marinate your meat. Use marinades that contain vinegar and/or lemon. This gives the surface a higher acidity, which drastically slows down the formation of HCA. Marinating for as little as 40 minutes is effective in reducing HCA. Thicker marinades have a tendency to "char," possibly increasing exposure to carcinogenic compounds so choose a thinner one.**

***Discard any juices before grilling. This will cause less smoke flare ups, limiting exposure to cancer-causing agents.**

***Always thaw meat first. This also reduces the cooking time.**

***Flip burgers often; once every minute. Turning burgers once a minute while cooking over lower heat reduces HCA and will kill E. coli bacteria. The meat should reach 160 degrees to kill the E. coli.**

***Keep the flames from touching the meat directly.**

***Create a barrier to prevent juices from spilling and producing harmful smoke. Try lining the grill with aluminum foil and poking holes, and cooking on cedar planks.**

***Eat a balanced diet rich in fruits and vegetables that contain protective antioxidants.**

***Use tongs instead of a fork to turn meat. Piercing the meat with a fork can release juices and fat that can cause flame flare-ups.**

***Grilling meat is not the only way HCA is produced in meat or fish. Any method of cooking meat with extremely high heat, such as pan searing; pan roasting or frying, can cause HCA to form. It is better to cook meat on lower heat.**