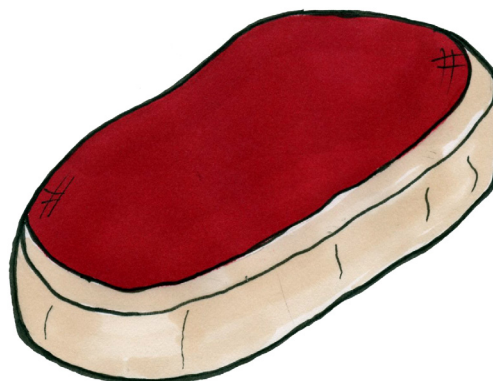


QUICK-COOKING MEAT



Things like chops, steaks, chicken breasts, sausages, and burgers all cook within a matter of minutes, while larger cuts and joints, like a leg of lamb or belly of pork, can take hours to cook. Quick-cooking meats can be used in all sorts of ways: griddled, roasted, grilled, pan-fried, or chopped up and used in stir-fries or pasta dishes.



Burgers and sausages have gained a bit of a bad reputation due to the fact that so many of them are made with poor-quality meat and a large numbers of additives. The good news is that today, many food manufacturers have changed their ingredients in-line with the increased focus on ethical standards for animals and demand from consumers for good-quality ingredients. This means that there are lots of good-quality versions of burgers and sausages in stores, you just have to know what to look for.

HOW TO SPOT GOOD SAUSAGES AND BURGERS

When buying sausages and burgers the first thing you want to look at is the meat content; The higher it is, the better quality the product. Meat content can vary greatly between different brands and supermarkets. Look for products with a minimum of 70% meat content. Cheaper sausages can have meat content as low as 20%, so it's definitely a case of getting what you pay for. Cheap products are often bulked out with lots of fat and filler ingredients so make sure you always check the label.

INGREDIENTS: PORK (85%), SEASONING (CONTAINS BREADCRUMBS [WHEAT, SALT*, YEAST*], POTATO STARCH, SALT*, WHITE PEPPER, SUGAR, COARSE BLACK PEPPER, ASCORBIC ACID, E300*, GROUND GINGER, GROUND SAGE, GROUND THYME, GROUND CAYENNE, NATURAL FLAVOUR), WATER*, NATURAL PORK CASING*

(* = APPROVED NON-ORGANIC INGREDIENT)

Here's an example from the packaging of a good-quality sausage: It's packed with meat at 85% pork, and contains only natural ingredients (the E number refers to vitamin C).

INGREDIENTS: PORK (42%), WATER, PORK FAT (10%), RUSK (WHEAT), POTATO STARCH, SOYA PROTEIN CONCENTRATE. INGREDIENTS LESS THAN 2%: SALT, FLAVOURINGS, STABILISERS: DIPHOSPHATES, GUAR GUM; ANTIOXIDANTS: E300 & E307; PRESERVATIVE: SODIUM METABISULPHITE, COLOUR: COCHINEAL.

CONTAINS: WHEAT, GLUTEN, SOYA, SULPHITES.

In comparison, here's an example from the packaging of a poor-quality sausage: This sausage contains much less meat at only 42%. It also contains flavourings, stabilisers, preservatives and added colour to boost the pink colour we expect to see in sausages.

QUICK-COOKING MEAT: FOOD SAFETY

When cooking with meat, remember to think about safety and hygiene so you avoid the risk of cross contamination (see *Food Safety: avoiding cross-contamination*)

- Wash your hands thoroughly before and after handling raw meat and poultry.
- Always make sure you use a separate, clean chopping board for raw meat or poultry to prevent the transfer of bacteria. NEVER use the same one for the rest of your food prep. In professional kitchens they'll often use a red chopping board for raw meat so chefs know not to use that board to chop other ingredients.
- Use separate kitchen utensils for raw meats or poultry and cooked foods, or wash them thoroughly in between use.
- When cooking poultry, cook thoroughly until it is piping hot throughout, no pink colour remains and the juices run clear.

THE THUMB TEST: HOW TO TELL IF A STEAK IS PERFECTLY COOKED

When it comes to meat that cooks quickly, it's hard to beat a good steak. There are several different types of steak, and depending on the thickness and particular cut (rib-eye, rump, sirloin, fillet etc.), it will cook in minutes and be a great source of protein.

If you order steak in a restaurant, you'll usually be asked how you like it cooked. *Blue* is when the steak has simply been seared, but is raw inside. *Rare* is cooked on the outside, but very pink and bloody inside. *Medium-rare* is slightly more cooked, *medium* is when a steak is mostly cooked through, but still blushing in the middle, and *well done* is cooked all the way through.

As a steak cooks, the meat tenses and becomes firmer in texture. An experienced chef can tell how cooked a steak is by simply touching it. The exercise below will help you learn how to gauge how cooked your meat is. Try it out when you next cook steak.

- Turn your left hand upside down and with your right thumb press down onto the ball of your left thumb. It should feel soft and squidgy. This is how *raw meat* feels, or how steak should feel before you start cooking it.
- Touch the tip of your left thumb and left index finger together, hold them there, and press your right thumb on the ball of your left thumb again. It should feel slightly tighter. This is how a steak feels when it is cooked to *rare*.

- Touch the tip of your left thumb and left middle finger together, hold them there, and press your right thumb on the ball of your left thumb again. It should feel slightly firmer again. This is how a steak feels when it is cooked to *medium rare*.
- Touch the tip of your left thumb and left ring finger together, hold them there, and press your right thumb on the ball of your left thumb again. It should feel quite firm. This is how a steak feels when it is cooked to *medium*.
- Touch the tip of your left thumb and little finger together, hold them there, and press your right thumb on the ball of your left thumb again. It should feel very firm. This is how a steak feels when it is cooked to *well done*.