



Grill Wisely

By Cheryl Bell, MS, RD, LDN, CHE

The grilling season officially runs from May through August, however 60% of us are grilling year round according to the latest reported results in the Annual Weber Grill Watch survey, now in its 19th year. That's good news because not only is grilling convenient but it is also a heart healthy way to cook.

75% of those who participated in the grill survey said they believed hamburgers are the easiest thing to grill (hot dogs received 80% of the vote) and 39% said they are grilling more lean meats than they did a year ago. The top two answers given in the survey with respect to which food people wanted to know how to cook better were: beef roasts and beef brisket. Whole chickens, turkeys, and pork roasts were subsequently named.

On the subject of knowing when food was cooked correctly before taking it off the grill, 58% said they rely on cutting into the food, while 21% said they just "wing it". How do you know if you've grilled your food long enough? Good question; here are some basic guidelines worth reviewing:

- The easiest way to check for proper doneness is to use an instant-read thermometer inserted horizontally into the side of burgers and steaks to check doneness. (Only 19% of those who participated in the survey said they used one.) The thermometer should penetrate the thickest part or center of the burger or steak; for steak, the thermometer should not touch bone or fat.

- Burgers should be cooked to a medium internal temperature of 160°F until no longer pink in the center and juices show no pink color and beef steaks are most juicy and tender when cooked medium rare (145°F) to medium (160°F) – roasts should be cooked to minimum of 145°F. All poultry should be cooked to a minimum of 165°F and fish should be cooked to 145° or until the flesh is opaque and flakes easily.

- Avoid charring by cooking with medium heat and use marinades or sauces with little sugar (which can burn easily). Brush sauces on food during the last few minutes of cooking.

If you have trouble judging if your charcoal grill has reached the proper medium heat level, try this test:

- When coals are ash (no longer flaming; approximately 30 minutes), check temperature cautiously by 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, which should be 4 seconds for medium heat.

It is also extremely important to practice food safety before your meat hits the grill:

- Do not defrost meats on the countertop! Thaw in the fridge, using the microwave or under cold running water. Foods thawed in the microwave or with cold water should also be used immediately.

- Always use separate cutting boards: one for raw meats and another for fruits and vegetables to avoid contamination and never put cooked meats on an unwashed plate that held the raw version.

- Remember that perishable food should not sit out for more than 2 hours, and when the weather is 90°F or higher, limit that to 1 hour. For more tips, log onto: Partnership for Food Safety Education at www.fightbac.org.

Have a great and safe grilling season this year. And in case you were wondering, the most popular grilling holiday is The Fourth of July, followed by: Labor Day, Memorial Day, Father's Day and Mother's Day.

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Dietitian, Chef & Meijer Healthy Living Advisor, Cheryl Bell, has been working in the field of nutrition and food education for more than 18 years. For menu ideas and recipes based on simple cooking techniques and strategies geared for hectic lifestyles, look for "Chef Cheryl" online at: www.meijer.com/healthyliving. -CWM

Cheryl's Top Burger Tips

Basic Lean Burgers

MIX: 1 lb. extra-lean ground beef (also called 95/5 or 5%), 1/4 c Italian or plain bread crumbs, 1 egg white, 1/4 t salt and 1/8 t black pepper in large bowl. **SHAPE:** into four 1/2 inch thick patties. **GRILL:** over medium heat uncovered for 11-13 minutes to 160°F. **SERVE:** on whole wheat buns, split with lettuce and tomato slices. **STATS:** Per serving: 272 calories; 8 g fat (3 g saturated fat; 3 g monounsaturated fat), 24 g carbohydrate; 3.6 g fiber. Adapted from *The Healthy Beef Cookbook*, Wiley, 2006.

Burger Change Ups

Rueben Burgers: Serve burgers on rye bread and top with sauerkraut, sauteed onion, reduced fat 2% milk Swiss cheese and Fat Free Thousand Island dressing.

Onion Burgers: Add 1/2 envelope dry onion-soup mix and 1 T chopped garlic to burger mixture in place of salt and pepper. Serve on toasted French Bread and top with sautéed onions and reduced fat 2% milk Monterey Jack cheese slices.

Pineapple Burgers: Add 1/2 c barbecue sauce to burger mixture and baste with teriyaki sauce while grilling. Top burgers with sliced pineapple.

Asian Burgers: Add in 2 T soy sauce and 1 t minced fresh gingerroot. Serve with shredded Napa cabbage, bell pepper strips, and bean sprouts.

Creole Burgers: Add 2 t Cajun seasoning to the burger mixture. In a small bowl, blend 1/3 c chopped onion, 1/3 c chopped green pepper, and 1/3 c reduced fat 2% milk shredded Monterey Jack cheese. Spoon 1/4 cup of cheese mixture into the centers of patties.



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