

## Serving it Safe--Grilled Style

Why heat your house to enjoy a healthy meal when you can fire up wholesome meals on your grill? Grilling meats and vegetables adds loads of flavor without extra calories. You may be concerned about reports connecting grilling with cancer, but you needn't worry about that unless you eat huge, blackened steaks for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Instead, your biggest concern with grilling is making sure that you use good food safety techniques to prevent food-borne illness.

Food safety rules for cooking indoors also apply to grilling on your back porch. You must wash your hands, keep cooked and raw foods separate, properly chill and heat foods, and a host of other common-sense approaches. Follow the tips below to keep your summer grilling safe for family and friends:

Clean your grubby paws. Wash your hands for about 20 seconds before and after handling food. Keep moist towelettes or hand sanitizer around when you can't get to soap and water.

Let me see your grill. Scrub the grill with hot, soapy water before each and every use.

Keep it chilled. Keep coolers stocked with plenty of ice or ice packs and keep meats refrigerated until it is time to place them on the grill.

Keep your tools clean. Use separate brushes for raw and for cooked meats, plus wash all brushes in hot, soapy water between uses.

Know the temperature. Always use a meat thermometer to make sure meats are cooked to a safe internal temperature.

When in doubt, throw it out. When temperatures outside hit 90 degrees Fahrenheit or above, perishable food items should not be out of a refrigerated environment for more than an hour.

Timing is everything. Toss grilled foods after three days.

Although cancer risks from grilling should not be your main concern, it still helps to understand the current thinking on the issue in order to cook smart. Briefly, grilling and cooking meats in other ways at very high temperatures produce chemicals that have been linked to increased cancer risks. The two primary carcinogens created in high-temp cooking are heterocyclic amines (HCAs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). The black charring on grilled foods is caused by the production of HCAs. PAHs develop from meat fat dripping onto hot coals; then the chemicals rise with the resulting smoke and land on the meat. This cancer research is still developing, but thus far hasn't shown that occasional grilled steak causes cancer. So, enjoy your Weber.

However, to make your grilling healthier and tastier, trim visible fat from meat before grilling. Drain high-fat marinades. Keep a water bottle handy for flare-ups. Never eat the blackened parts of the meat. Try these tips from the American Dietetic Association to savor the flavor of grilling while at the same time lessening potential health risks:

Lock the flavor in. Marinate vegetables, meat, poultry and fish, then you'll depend less on the grill for that little something extra.

Timing is everything. Brush on light, oil-based sauces earlier in grilling. For less charring, baste sauces containing sugars (fruit puree, honey, preserves) toward the end of the cooking.

Don't forget your veggies. Add a little olive oil and herbs before grilling. Keep in mind that charring vegetables could also produce carcinogens, so avoid eating the blackened areas.

Smoke it over. Brush a little liquid smoke for a more outdoor taste with less time over the coals.

Bring it up from the rear. You don't need to sacrifice flavor by decreasing the amount of fat used in preparing grilled food. Try seasoning your coals toward the ending of grilling by sprinkling fresh herbs, citrus or apple peels, even whole, unpeeled garlic cloves on your coals for a delicate flavor that's sure to please.

Get ahead of the game. Precook meats then quickly grill for flavor.

Who wants to cook inside during the dog days of summer? With all meals, you need to make sure that the foods that you offer your family is nutritious, delicious and most of all, safe. Beat the kitchen heat of summer by firing up your grill for health and flavor.