

Grillin' Time

Enjoy cooking outdoors — without raking your health over the coals

by MADELEINE GREY

It's summertime and you're lazily brushing barbecue sauce on a set of chicken wings while the kids giggle and tumble on the lawn. But this idyllic scene is killed by a pesky thought that buzzes through your brain like a mosquito. Is this food safe?

Barbecuing is not as facile as beer commercials suggest. From flipping a burger to grilling salmon, there are bigger concerns than those rain clouds lurking overhead. There are health hazards linked to barbecuing, something every grill master wants to avoid. The good news is you can.

BAR CHAR

Heterocyclic amines (HCAs) are carcinogenic chemical reactions formed when red meat, poultry and fish are charred or overcooked. They are more likely to occur on a barbecue, but indoor cooking techniques like broiling, roasting or frying can all create unwanted HCAs too.

"Simply put," says Sarah Wilson of the Food Safety Network at the University of Guelph, "you want to make sure the inside is cooked without charring the outside."

There's another villain we want to banish from our barbecues. Think flare-ups. When a sudden flame issues up from under the grill, burning fat creates polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). These chemicals, which develop from the smoke off the burning fat, are harmful.

Safe tactics

- Do not overcook. Those who love rare steak can revel in the fact that



The Dish on Portions	
calories	310
protein	40.4 g
fat	3.8 g
carbohydrates	29.2 g
niacin	107%*
iron	11%*
vitamin A	22%*
vitamin C	173%*

*of recommended daily amount

Honey Mustard Chicken Skewers

A high-sugar basting sauce like honey mustard burns easily on the grill. Here's a novel solution that eliminates unwanted charring, but keeps kids' taste buds happy.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>4
½
2
¼ cup (50 mL)
¼ cup (50 mL)</p> | <p>skinless, boneless chicken breasts (about 1½ lb/750 g)
pineapple
red bell peppers
Dijon mustard
honey
pepper</p> |
|--|---|

Slice chicken into ¾ in. (2 cm) cubes (8 pieces per breast). Slice pineapple in half horizontally, to create 2 rings. Slice each ring into 12 pieces. Slice red bell peppers into 1 in. (2.5 cm) cubes to make 24 pieces. Thread 8 bamboo skewers with chicken, red pepper and pineapple (4 pieces of chicken, but just 3 pieces each of pineapple and red pepper per skewer). Arrange on a wax-paper-lined tray. Baste skewers with Dijon mustard and season with ground black pepper.

Place honey in a small pot and heat gently on stovetop (or barbecue element) until it is runny and liquid. Grill skewers on medium high for 7 to 8 minutes per side or until a thermometer placed into the chicken reads 170°F (77°C). Using a clean basting brush, baste skewers with hot honey and serve.

Makes 4 servings.

Our recipe tester, Adell Shneer, tests Nutrition using both imperial and metric measurements. However, proportions in the metric version may differ slightly from the original, causing small variations in the result.

really well-done beef is actually hazardous to your health.

- Heat moderately. On the grill, that can mean initially searing on high heat, then reducing to a lower heat for the rest of the cooking. Or raise the grill rack.
- Partially cook before you grill. Microwave chicken (and throw away the juices) or parboil/steam ribs before barbecuing.
- Oil plus fire equals flare-ups. Prevent PAHs by trimming visible fat, choosing lean and extra-lean cuts more often (rather than fatty hot dogs or sausages), removing poultry skin, avoiding oily marinades or sauces, and keeping a spray bottle handy.
- Minimize cooking time. Go small and fast, with kebabs, satays and smaller cuts of fish, meat or poultry.
- Don't drip. Opt for tongs versus forks, which pierce foods and let juices escape, causing flare-ups.
- Remove any burnt or charred bits before serving. (Ditto at restaurants and other people's backyards — if you can!)
- Eat grilled peaches or veggie kebabs to your heart's content. Fruit, veggies and tofu present no risk of HCAs.

BANISH BACTERIA

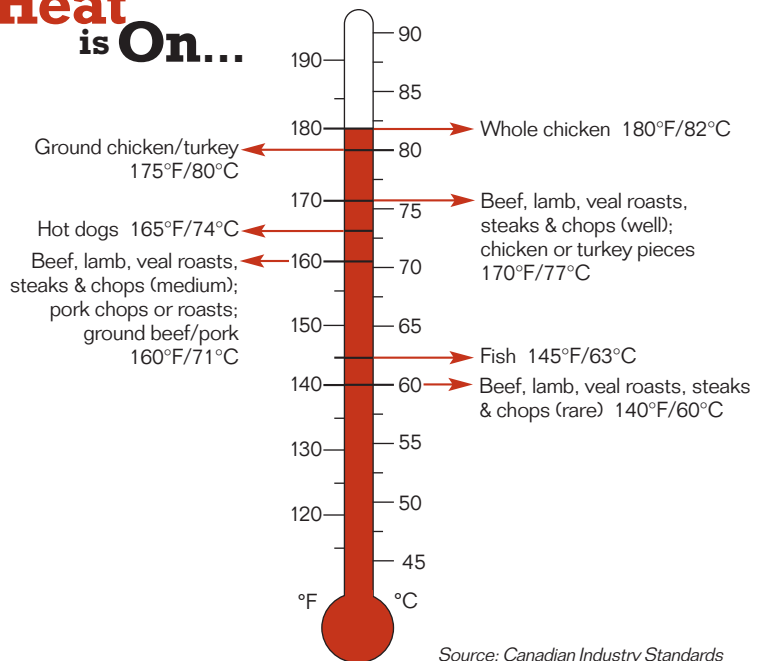
When cooking goes outside, food safety issues compound, warns Brenda Watson, executive director of the Canadian Partnership for Consumer Food Safety Education in Cambridge, Ont.

"A barbecue is often a celebration, a family occasion," says Watson, but a party atmosphere doesn't exactly breed vigilance. Young children, expectant moms and the elderly — all integral to family occasions — are also particularly vulnerable to food-borne illness. Add to the mix a grillmeister who's less familiar with food safety drills, and that barbecue party enters the high-risk zone.

Keep it clean

Watson says that 11 to 13 million Canadians contract food-borne illness every year. Those who grill can keep out of that statistical pool by practis-

The Heat is On...



Source: Canadian Industry Standards

ing these precautionary routines:

- Keep raw foods separate from cooked.
- Use a clean plate and utensils for barbecued food and avoid that common faux pas of putting freshly barbecued food on the same plate that brought out the raw.
- Wash the plate and utensils that touched the raw food in hot, soapy water and sanitize with a mild bleach solution of 1 tsp (5 mL) bleach in 3 cups (750 mL) water. Use water to rinse away the bleach solution.

Is it done like dinner?

Hamburgers are a summertime staple, but food-borne illness caused by *E. coli* slinks perilously close. Most backyard chefs are not apt to reach for the one thing that could help prevent this: a food thermometer. In fact, according to a study conducted in 2002 by Thompson Lightstone Research, "fewer than one in five Canadians regularly uses a food thermometer."

This is cause for concern, says Margaret Thibeault of the Beef Information Centre who rhymes off "a burger is done at 71" to remind consumers of the safe centigrade temperature (160°F).

Thibeault emphasizes that colour is not a reliable indicator for burgers. Nor does a peek inside a chicken thigh make the definitive call for safe doneness. Studies show that a burger can be brown at an unsafe temperature. Conversely, preformed frozen burgers can be pink at a safe temperature. Best to rely on a thermometer, which means removing a burger from the grill and inserting the stem into the patty horizontally to reach the middle. The same goes for thin meats like chops (veal, lamb or pork), minute steak or chicken breast. A good rule of thumb is to insert the stem of the thermometer in at least 1½ in. (4 cm) for an accurate reading.

Avoid bacteria and HCAs by using a digital, instant-read thermometer and our chart (see "The Heat Is On..."). A thermometer ensures not only food safety, but also tastier, juicier meat, taking the guesswork out of grilling. ♥

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Ask Madeleine Greay your food and nutrition questions on the first Tuesday of every month in her online forum at Todaysparent.com/forums.