



Food Facts

Beef up on Healthy Barbecues

It's that time of the year again - UK weather permitting! With our new enthusiasm for cooking out of doors comes the health risks of barbecued food. Here are some tips to help minimise the possible health risks of barbecued foods...

Beware bugs!

Not the flying variety, but the microscopic type that can at best cause a tummy upset and, at worst result in a hospital stay. Remember a few simple rules to keep you safe:

- Keep all fresh meat, salads and dressings in the fridge until use. Set your fridge at a colder setting to compensate for frequent door openings
- Using frozen meats? Make sure they defrost fully before cooking.
- Meat pink inside? Cook for longer to prevent tummy bugs.
- Keep raw and cooked foods separate - use different utensils and plates for each to minimise cross-contamination.
- Wash all raw fruits, vegetables and salads thoroughly before use, especially if you're pregnant.
- Cover all food out of doors to prevent flies enjoying your meal.



A cancer risk?

Grilling meat, poultry and fish produces chemicals called heterocyclic amines (HCAs). When fat from grilled meats drips onto hot coal, another group of chemicals called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are produced that are deposited back onto the food by smoke and flames that blacken the meat. Both HCA and PCA are chemicals that are known to increase cancer risk, especially if consumed at frequent intervals over a long period of time. There's no need to exclude barbecued foods from your diet, but if you are looking to lower your cancer risk as much as possible it makes sense to take a few precautions:

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- Choose lean cuts of meat and have smaller portions of high fat meats such as sausages or ribs. Trim off fat and remove skin before cooking. Keep meat portions thin, or cook meat chunks on metal skewers so they need only a short time to barbecue.
- Use tongs or a spatula to turn food. Piercing meat allows fat and juices to drip onto the coals. Grill foods in foil to keep the smoke out, or finish off thick pieces of meat in the microwave to avoid excessive burning of the surface.
- Marinate meats before cooking to reduce HCA levels by over 95%. It seems that ingredients used in marinades are rich in cancer-fighting anti-oxidants, such as citrus juices, herbs, spices and olive oil.
- Remove badly burnt bits before eating!
- Serve barbecue meats with a yoghurt dip - yoghurt bacteria (alive or dead) bind these chemicals and protect the digestive tract.



Pep up your plate!

- Vegetables provide our healthy anti-oxidant nutrients and can be grilled, too! Wrap a whole onion or garlic bulb in foil (complete with skin) and cook on the barbecue for 15-20 minutes or so, until soft.
- Skewer a selection of vegetables brushed with olive oil (or marinate before skewering for even more flavour) and barbecue until cooked.
- Try a fruit kebab for a completely different taste experience! Serve with fromage frais, yoghurt or ice-cream as an ideal pud for the barbecue!
- Cook a banana in its skin for 10 minutes on the barbecue, then unwrap for a sweet treat. For a different taste, wrap peeled bananas in foil after sprinkling them with lemon juice, cinnamon and a teaspoon of brown sugar, and barbecue until softened.
- Don't like bananas? Have a fruit salad or fruit pavlova to finish to provide those important anti-oxidant nutrients to mop up the risky chemicals.



by Catherine Collins, SRD