

Appetite for Knowledge



COOKING TODAY'S PORK

One of the most common misconceptions about pork is that it needs to be cooked well-done.

For many decades, it was common practice to cook pork to a minimum internal temperature of 160°F. The slightest trace of pink meat was cause for alarm.

In 2011, the United States Department of Agriculture updated their recommendations. The USDA now lists 145°F as its recommended safe minimum cooking temperature for fresh pork. Whole cuts of pork should be cooked to an internal temperature of 145°F for medium-rare, 150°F for medium, 155°F for medium-well, and 160°F for well-done. Ground pork must be cooked to 160°F.

BENEFITS OF PORK

Pork compares favorably for fat, calories, and cholesterol with many other meats and poultry. While providing a greater amount of vitamins and minerals, many cuts of pork are as lean or leaner than chicken. The tenderloin is the leanest cut of pork and as lean as a skinless chicken breast.

PICKING AND COOKING DIFFERENT CUTS

When selecting your pork, buy a deeply colored cut. The darker your pork, the more flavorful it will be. Look for pork that hasn't leaked a lot of liquid into the pillow pack in the bottom of the packaging. If it has, it will be likelier to dry out during cooking. In addition, be sure you pick the right cut of pork for the method of cooking you want to use on it.



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There are two basic methods for cooking meat: moist or dry heat. Tender cuts like pork chops and pork tenderloin can be cooked by dry heat; think grilling, broiling, roasting, or pan searing. Cuts with more connective tissue – pork ribs and pork shoulder – are less tender, and can benefit from moist cooking, like simmering or braising.

BACON

The best way to cook bacon is in the oven or on the grill. For the oven, it's as easy as laying out bacon in a single layer on a foil lined rimmed baking sheet, sliding it into a cold oven, and firing it up to 425°F.

PORK CHOPS

Bone-in pork chops also called rib chops, are a great choice for quick-cooking methods like pan frying, grilling, or broiling. Bone-in pork chops are suited to being seared in a hot skillet and finished in the oven. For best results, choose bone-in pork chops that are 1 to 1 1/2-inches thick.

Boneless center-cut pork chops are very versatile. Choose these pork chops for frying, grilling, stuffing, broiling, or baking. Cook time and color are not accurate ways to measure the doneness of pork chops. Cooked to 145°F, the meat is tender, juicy,

and just a touch pink. Don't forget, some pink is okay!

RIBS

Pork bone-in or boneless country style ribs are best cooked to an internal temperature of 170°F, or until it falls apart easily with two forks or tongs. While technically considered safe to eat when cooked to 145°F, ribs are best when cooked to at least 170°F or when it is easy to shred. The best way to cook country-style ribs is low and slow!

Each cut of ribs requires a slightly different method. Spare ribs are best when grilled, smoked, broiled, or barbecued. Back ribs are best when braised slowly in a covered pot or foil packet, and then finished on a grill with a generous brushing of sauce. Optimum temperature is 180°F for spare ribs, and 190°F for back ribs, or until the meat pulls away from the rib bones easily.

PORK SHOULDER

Pork shoulder (also known as pork butt) is a cut of meat from the upper part of the front leg of a pig. It is marbled with fat so it will have the best texture when you braise it slowly on low heat. Cook it to at least 170°F, or until the meat shreds easily. It is my go-to cut for pulled pork recipes.



PORK LOIN AND TENDERLOIN

The pork tenderloin is long and thin. This muscle runs along the pig's backbone. Pork tenderloin is one of the easiest and fastest cooking cuts of pork. It's best when pan seared, grilled, barbecued, roasted, or broiled.

The pork loin roast is short and wide, and it comes from the back of the pig. A pork loin or roast is an easy and forgiving cut of pork to cook. Grill, roast, or bake this cut of meat.

GROUND PORK

You can cook ground pork much as you do ground beef, breaking it up in the pan and browning it for a variety of dishes. For food safety, always cook ground pork to an internal temperature of at least 160°F.

To check doneness properly, use an instant-read cooking thermometer to measure the temperature at the thickest part of the cut without touching any bone. Once you have reached the desired internal temperature, remove from heat and let it rest.

Pork is easy to cook, and you should make it a part of your cooking routine. Choose the right cooking method for the pork cut, and remember one rule: do not overcook this lean meat!

Sources

- Fight Bac!, fightbac.org
- Pork Checkoff, pork.org
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, USDA.gov



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