

## Perfect Burger Secrets

The hamburger is the ultimate American sandwich, no matter how you flip it. A restaurant may be your go-to for a perfect burger, but that does not mean you have to leave your house for an excellent hamburger. The ultimate hamburger is an elusive creation: a perfectly charred crust, juicy interior, and beefy flavor are hard to achieve.

Here are some best practices for hamburgers to bring your burgers from “good” to “great!” These are what I consider to be the critical factors in hamburger perfection. Before you begin, wash your hands with soap and warm water.

The most crucial factor in the perfect burger is the meat. Make tender burgers by grinding meat or buying good quality ground beef from the store. You want to see the individual strands of meat still loosely intact after coming out of the grinder. If the hamburger was stuffed into meat tubes, it was already compacted too much and will not make a great burger.

Select 80/20 (lean/fat) beef. The meat must have a higher fat content to achieve a deliciously juicy burger. Use equal parts chuck and sirloin. Keep the meat cold until preparing it for patties.

Adding an extra element can bring out the best in an ordinary burger. Secret ingredients (such as a spoonful of mayonnaise, plain yogurt, or sour cream) help create some of the best burgers that pack the moisture and flavor. Try some minced or diced mix-ins. Gently mix any ingredients with a fork, and do not overwork the meat.

To prevent the burgers from getting too dense and firm, run your hands under cool water, and work as quickly as possible. Divide the ground beef into equal portions based on how many patties you make. Gently flatten each portion to make a patty. Try to handle the meat as little as possible. The heat from your hands will melt the fat, making the patty dense. Move it lightly from hand to hand and loosely make a patty  $\frac{3}{4}$  - to one-inch thick, slightly bigger than the bun. Use a hamburger press, two deli container lids, or a large jar lid for uniform patties.

A loosely packed patty makes for a juicy hamburger! If hamburger patties are packed too tightly, they risk drying out and becoming tough.

Form the patties with a slight indentation in the center with your thumb. This prevents the burgers from swelling up in the middle as they cook.

Another helpful step is letting the patties chill in the fridge for an hour after forming, which helps them stay together and hold their shape while cooking.

Spices and seasoning blends create tongue-tingling magic with even the most straightforward burger recipe! Season the burgers within minutes of the time they hit the grill, griddle, or skillet for the best flavor. Do not add salt to the ground beef if you are forming the burgers ahead of time. Salt starts affecting meat – dissolving proteins and drawing out moisture – the moment it comes in contact with it, negatively affecting the texture of the burgers.

To ensure that burgers cook perfectly, preheat the grill or skillet. Use high heat and cook them quickly. The goal is to sear the outside of the hamburger to form a great crust while keeping the inside juicy.

Be sure **not** to press down or flatten the burgers while cooking — this squeezes the juices and dries them out. Flip only once! As meat cooks, the heat pushes the juices away from the heat source.

It is imperative to cook the meat thoroughly. The FDA and USDA recommend 160°F internal temperature for all ground meat, except poultry. Do not take a chance guessing; use a good instant-read thermometer! Before assembling the hamburgers, take off the heat and let them rest for a few minutes so their juice redistributes through the patty.

Now that you know these handy burger secrets, you will be preparing delicious burgers at home in no time.

(Sources: [www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com](http://www.beefitswhatsfordinner.com); [www.fda.gov](http://www.fda.gov); [www.foodnetwork.com](http://www.foodnetwork.com); [www.seriousseats.com](http://www.seriousseats.com); [www.snappyliving.com](http://www.snappyliving.com); [tasteofhome.com](http://tasteofhome.com))