

Safer grilling methods might cut cancer risk

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Expert offers tips for healthier outdoor cooking.

(HealthDay) -- A few simple changes in how people grill outdoors, such as avoiding too much beef or processed meats and not charring foods, can aid in cancer prevention, according to an expert.

"Two aspects of the traditional American cookout, what you grill and how you grill it, can potentially raise [cancer risk](#)," Alice Bender, a dietitian with the American Institute for Cancer Research, said in an institute news release. "Diets that feature big portions of red and [processed meat](#) have been shown to make colorectal cancer more likely. Evidence that grilling itself is a risk factor is less strong, but it only makes sense to take some easy cancer-protective precautions," she added.

One way to help prevent cancer is to avoid overcooking foods on the

grill, Bender said. Charring, she explained, results in the formation of cancer-causing compounds called heterocyclic amines (HCAs) and [polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons](#) (PAHs).

Bender offered four other ways to grill more safely:

- **Add color (but not red meat).** By cutting back on [red meat](#) and grilling a wider variety of colorful [fruits and vegetables](#), people will increase their intake of phytochemicals. These naturally occurring compounds found in plants offer protection against cancer, Bender said. She suggested grilling vegetables like asparagus, onions, mushrooms, zucchini, eggplant and corn on the cob, which can be grilled whole, in chunks or in a basket. When grilling fruits, she noted, brush them with olive oil so they won't stick. Bender added that fruits should be grilled a day or two before they are completely ripe so they retain their texture.
- **Mix it up.** Opt for chicken or fish instead of hamburgers or hotdogs.
- **Marinate.** Marinating meat reduces the formation of HCAs, Bender advised. Marinating meats in seasoned vinegar or lemon juice for even just 30 minutes can be beneficial, she noted.
- **Pre-cook (partially).** Pre-cooking meat will reduce the amount of time it spends exposed to high heat on the grill and reduce the formation of HCAs. Bender cautioned that partially pre-cooked meats should be transferred from the kitchen to the grill right away.
- **Cook slowly.** By grilling meats slowly at a lower heat, they are less likely to burn or char. Bender said this will reduce the amount of HCAs and PAHs that end up on people's plates.

Bender added that visible fat should be trimmed off meats to avoid high flames or flare-ups, and that any charred portions of meat should also be

cut off.

More information: The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has more about [grilling safety](#).

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