



How to Know if Food is Undercooked

Even some of the best restaurants serve out food poisoning sometimes, so it shouldn't be a surprise this can happen to you. Take time to learn some techniques for testing the doneness of your meal.

Steps

- 1 Use a tested recipe, and follow instructions carefully.** You do not want to serve undercooked food, but often overcooking it means the dogs will be eating it anyway.
- 2 Check the temperature of your oven.** Oven temperatures vary significantly from the dial setting. An oven control dial may say "350", yet the oven will be cooler (or hotter) than this by a significant amount.
- 3 Preheat the oven unless the cooking instructions say otherwise.** The few minutes it takes an oven to reach cooking temperature are not minutes the food is actually cooking at THAT temperature.
- 4 Learn the correct temperatures for different meats, then use a thermometer to check it.**
 - Chicken: 165 F.
 - Beef: 155 F.
 - Pork: 160 F.
 - Ground beef: 165 F.
 - Fish: 145 F
- 5 Place the probe of your thermometer into the thickest part of the meat (the center), but not touching a bone.** The thickest part of the cut will be the slowest to reach the desired temperature.
- 6 Be aware of the quality of the food you are cooking.** Bacteria are the primary concern in causing food poisoning, and practically any food can be contaminated if it is not handled properly. Food which may have been left in the freezer too long, or left out unrefrigerated when it should have been should be discarded.
- 7 Look at the food when it is finished cooking.** The fluids draining from poultry should be clear when you cut it, and the meat tissue attached to the bone should have no pinkness evident. Beef, when handled properly, may be pink, or even red, but ground beef, because of handling and processing, is more likely to be exposed to bacteria and should never be eaten pink. Pork will have an even, light appearance with no pink showing at all. Cured ham labeled fully cooked requires no further cooking.
- 8 Cook vegetables until they are tender to your personal taste.** Potatoes, carrots, and other large "chunky" vegetables are usually done when a fork can be inserted easily, but before they become mushy.
- 9 Use the clean knife test on cakes and baked batter breads.** Insert a knife in the center, and if it comes out clean, the baked item is fully cooked.
- 10 Learn to adjust recipes for cooking at high elevations.** Since the higher you are above sea level, the lower the boiling point of water, cooking at very high elevations require more cooking time.
- 11 Test your pasta.** When cooking pasta on a stove top, you can remove some and taste test it to make sure it is cooked through.

Tips

- To increase cooking time without sacrificing moisture, place aluminum foil over meat to trap steam, or use a "basting bag".
- When in doubt, cook a little more, but remember, the smoke from the oven may be your dinner turning to charcoal.
- Many turkeys come with a pop out indicator to tell if they are done. One school of thought says to cook poultry to 160 degrees, another (USDA) says 170-175 (these are Fahrenheit temperatures).
- Follow cooking instructions in the recipe to the letter, they should have been tested and proven accurate.
- Undercooking vegetables is a matter of taste. It is common for most vegetables to be served in salads raw, if they are palatable.
- Sometimes, odors will help you decide if something is done, but that is a subjective means.
- Note packaging instructions, including safe handling instructions, particularly on meat products.

Warnings

- Undercooked food may cause serious illness or even death.
- Don't eat food that is undercooked. Remember the suggestions above to check if you are being served undercooked food.
- Visit the websites listed below for more detailed information.

Things You'll Need

- Meat thermometer.
- Trusted recipes, or a good recipe book.

Sources and Citations

- <http://ashleys.net/recipes/MeatTemperature.htm>

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