



Stack burgers to use meat thermometer

We use our grill primarily to cook hamburgers and hot dogs. How am I supposed to use a meat thermometer on these foods? I'm especially concerned about the hamburgers — we usually use thin frozen burgers on the grill.

First, good for you for using a meat thermometer. Too many people rely on other cues — time on the grill or color of the meat, for example — that just aren't good measures for being sure the food is done.

Generally, if a patty (or any type of meat) is too thin to insert a meat thermometer deep enough for a reliable reading, you can stack patties on top of each other and get a reading that way. Be sure to take several readings in different spots to be sure you get the temperature from the middle of a patty. If the temperature fluctuates between readings, use the lowest reading as the most accurate measurement.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, cook hamburger patties until the internal temperature reaches at least 160 degrees F. For turkey burgers or other poultry, wait until it reaches 165 degrees. Pork cuts are safely done at 160 degrees; while beef, veal or lamb steaks, roasts or chops are safe at a medium-rare 145 degrees; for medium, cook until the internal temperature is 160 degrees.

When using a meat thermometer on chicken, steaks or other cuts of

meat, be sure to keep the tip of the thermometer away from bone, fat or gristle — you want to measure the temperature of the meat, not that other stuff.

For hot dogs, you can insert the thermometer from the end to get an accurate reading. Since hot dogs are fully cooked before being packaged, they generally aren't included in cooking temperature guidelines. However, because they are associated with *Listeria monocytogenes* — a particular food safety risk for pregnant women — official guidelines say to cook them until steam rises from the surface. If you prefer a more specific measurement, use the guideline for reheating leftovers, and heat to 165 degrees. Or, boil the hot dogs first to get the surface to 212 degrees F, and then toss on the grill to get those nice-looking grill lines.

You mentioned you usually cook frozen burgers on the grill. Do you thaw them first? If so, you'll get more even cooking. (Be sure to thaw in the refrigerator, not at room temperature, to prevent a food safety problem.) If you put them on the grill frozen, it's especially important to take several readings to make sure the burgers are cooked through.

For more information on grilling food safety, see http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/Barbecue_Food_Safety/index.asp.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH, 43210-1044, or filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu.



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