

How to Make Juicy Burgers

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Co-authored by **wikiHow Staff** and **8 contributors**

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Homemade hamburgers are a delicious treat for lunch or dinner, and can be made on a stovetop or a grill. Keeping the burger juicy will seal the flavor inside of the meat. A juicy, thick burger will have more flavor than a thin, dry, overcooked burger. To cook juicy burgers, purchase ground beef with a high amount of fat. Handle the patties gently when you're shaping them. Finally, avoid squashing the burgers with a spatula while they're cooking.

Things You'll Need

■ Stovetop Burgers

- ☐ Ground beef patties
- ☐ Thin spatula
- ☐ Frying pan
- ☐ Meat thermometer (optional)

■ Grilled Burgers

- ☐ Ground beef patties
- ☐ Olive oil
- ☐ Paper towel
- ☐ Spatula
- ☐ Meat thermometer (optional)

Method 1 of 3: Preparing Your Patties



1 Shop for fresh-ground meat to make burgers with. Freshly ground beef will make the best and juiciest hamburgers. Look in the supermarket's butcher case. This will have been ground more recently than packaged beef. In general, avoid purchasing pre-packaged beef for your burgers.^[1]

Why fresh-ground beef?

It's juicier and tastier. Frozen and pre-packaged ground beef often has freezer burn—ice crystals form within the meat, decreasing the flavorful juices you love in your burger. It's also impossible to know how fresh the meat was when it was frozen. By buying fresh, you know the quality you're getting.

Find fresh-ground beef at the butcher, or the meat counter at your grocery store. If you have a local butcher, head there for the freshest cuts of beef. You can also see if the meat counter at your local grocery store will grind up some fresh beef for you.

You can freeze fresh beef yourself. Wrap the beef tightly in waxy butcher or freezer paper and tape it shut, then wrap a layer of aluminum foil over that. Tape it shut, write the date on the package, and cook it within 4 months. To defrost, leave it in the fridge until completely thawed. If you're short on time, take the meat out of the wrap and place it under cool running water for 20 minutes to an hour.



2 Purchase ground beef with 80% lean and 20% fat. Meat with this ratio has a relatively high percentage of fat to lean. Fattier beef will always result in a juicer burger. 85% lean and 15% fat should be okay, too; just avoid any ground beef that is 90% lean or higher, which will make for a dry burger. You can buy ground beef at any supermarket. If you prefer organic meat, check the organic section or a health food grocery store.^[2]

Understanding Beef Labels

Check the percentage of the meat. Most beef is labeled with 2 percentages, telling you how much lean meat and how much fat is present in the cut. This is the most accurate way to tell what the lean to fat ratio is, so should be your go-to when buying.

Look at the name, or cut, of the meat. Your meat may be labeled based on what part of the cow it came from. If the cut is labeled but a percentage is not given, you can go by the following general guidelines to tell the lean to fat ratio:

Hamburger (can come from any part): 73% lean, 27% fat

Ground chuck: 80% lean, 20% fat

Ground round: 85% lean, 15% fat

Ground sirloin: 90% lean, 10% fat

Lean ground beef: 95% lean, 5% fat

See how red the meat is. The more lean meat that ground beef contains, the redder it will be. Don't go for a cut that's deep red, as it won't contain very much juicy fat.



3 Tear off a generous chunk of beef to form the patties. Once you've brought the ground beef home, you can form the individual patties. The size of the patties can be left up to personal preference, but in general a fist-sized chunk of beef will produce a good sized burger.

^[3]



4 Handle the meat gently. When you're tearing chunks of beef off of the slab you bought, do not handle and squeeze the meat too much. If you mash the beef while you're handling it, you'll wring some of the moisture out of the meat.

[4]



5 Form burger patties with your hands. Use your hands to gently press each fist-sized chunk of ground beef into a relatively **flat**, disc-shaped patty. If you're working on a hard surface (a clean countertop or a plastic cutting board), you can press the patties against the surface to avoid squeezing them too hard with your hands.[5]

- Shape your patties however you like. In general, the patties should be about 4 inches (10 cm) across and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (1.9 cm) high before cooking.



6 Press a $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (0.64 cm) dimple into the center of each burger. Your burgers will cook quickly at the edges, and more slowly in the centers. To achieve a burger that is evenly cooked through, use your index and middle finger to press a dimple into the top of each burger. Aim to make the center of each patty about $\frac{1}{8}$ – $\frac{1}{4}$ inch (0.32–0.64 cm) lower than the edges of the patty.^[6]

- The dimple will also prevent your burgers from bulging up in the middle.

Method
2

Method 2 of 3: Cooking Burgers on the Stovetop



1 Set a flat frying pan on a burner at medium-high heat. Depending on the number of burgers you're planning to cook, you can use either a large or a small frying pan.^[7]

- On most ranges, medium-high heat will be about 7.



2 Add the burgers once the pan is hot. The patties should each sizzle when they hit the hot surface of the pan.^[8] Give each burger at least 1 inch (2.5 cm) of space on either side in the skillet, so that none of the burgers fuse together as they cook.



3 Flip the patties with a thin spatula after a 3-5 minutes. Once the burgers have cooked for a few minutes, slide a thin spatula under each burger and flip it over. As when molding the patties, the burgers will stay juicier if you handle them as little as possible while cooking. When flipped, each burger should have been seared to a dark golden-brown on the bottom side.^[9]

Tips on flipping:

Check the underside of the patty first. Slip your spatula under the patty after about 3 minutes and tip it upwards to get a glimpse of the underside. The patty should have a nice golden-brown color. If it's still a little pink, give it another minute or so.

Use a wide, thin spatula. This kind of spatula is easy to quickly slide under the burger. It also lets you flip without crumbling the crust and helps a loosely-made burger stay together a bit better as you flip.

Don't press the burgers down with your spatula. This pushes the juice out of the meat, making for a dryer burger, and won't help the patty cook any faster.



4 Cook the burgers for another 3-5 minutes on the second side. Cooking the burgers for 3-5 minutes on both sides should ensure that they're evenly cooked through. You'll know that the burger is done on the second side when it begins to sizzle. Look to see that the burger is a nice golden-brown color.

- Resist the urge to flip the burgers over 3 or 4 times. Once will be enough.



5 Watch the side of the burgers to see how done they are. If you cut into a burger to see when it's done, you'll risk losing some of the juiciness you've worked hard to preserve. Instead, take a close look at the sides of a burger.

If there's a slight line of pink in the middle of the side, the burger is medium-rare.

[10]

- If the sides are all browned, the burger is medium.



6 **Serve the burgers when they're medium-rare or medium.** As the burgers continue to cook, more juice will cook out of them.^[11] Ensure that you'll have a juicy, flavorful burger by serving the patty when it's medium-rare or medium.

- Set the burger on a bun, and garnish with tomato, lettuce, mustard, ketchup, and whatever else you choose.

Method
3

Method 3 of 3: Grilling Juicy Burgers



1 **Pre-heat the grill before applying your burgers.** Heat two separate regions of the grill: one to be a high-heat zone at about 250 °F (121 °C). Set the other as a low-heat zone, about 150 °F (66 °C).^[12]

- Let the grill pre-heat for 15 minutes before you apply the patties.



2 Oil the grill as it pre-heats. While the grill is warming up, drizzle some olive oil onto a paper towel. Rub the paper towel along the surface of the grill to lubricate it. This will help your patties cook evenly and prevent them from sticking to the grill as they brown.^[13]



3 Set your patties on the high-heat side of the grill for about 2 minutes. The intense heat of the grill will create a delicious browned crust on either side of the burger, which adds to the rich flavor of the meat.^[14]

- If you were to leave the burger over high heat, the temperature would dry out the interior of the burger and eventually overcook the whole patty.



4 Flip the burgers after about 2 minutes. After the burgers have cooked for about 2 minutes on the high-heat side of the grill, use a spatula to flip them over. When flipping the burgers, keep them at a distance of about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (1.3 cm) from each other.

[15]

- If the burgers are too close together, they may cook unevenly or fuse together while cooking.



5 Move the patties over to the low-heat side once they're browned on both sides. Once both sides of the burgers are evenly browned, use your spatula to gingerly lift the patties and move them to the low-heat side of the grill. [16]

- Keep a close eye on the cooking burgers so that you can remove them from the grill when they're as done as you'd like them to be.



6 Cook the burgers for 3-4 minutes on the low-heat side. Here, their juicy insides will continue to cook without getting dried out or burnt. Use the full surface of the low-heat side of your grill to keep the burgers from touching one another.^[17]

- Flip the burgers at about the 2-minute mark.
This will ensure that all of the patties are evenly cooked through on both sides.



7 Remove the burgers when they're medium-rare to medium 130–140 °F (54–60 °C). Evaluate how cooked the burgers are by paying attention to their size and firmness. Burgers will shrink and tighten up as they cook. A rare burger will still be juicy if lightly pressed with a spatula, and will be soft and slightly squishy.

^[18]

- If you're using a meat thermometer, a rare burger will be about 125 °F (52 °C) . A medium-well burger will be about 150 °F (66 °C) .
- If you cook your burger to a higher temperature, it will no longer be juicy.



Community Q&A

Question

Do I need to press in the center of the patty when I am cooking the patty on a grill?



Mackenzie McConnell
Community Answer

You do not have to, although it is recommended for a juicier burger patty. The thumb trick absorbs all the liquids into the burger to make it taste better.

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 0

Question

Do I have to use beef?



Community Answer

No. Common substitutions for beef in burgers include chicken, turkey, veggies, and beans.

Helpful 1 Not Helpful 3

Question

What type of oil should be put on the stove before putting the burger there?



Community Answer

Any oil should work. I would use vegetable or olive oil. However, if you want a buttery bun, use butter.

Helpful 0 Not Helpful 2

Question

Can I use a regular towel if I don't have a paper towel?



Mackenzie McConnell
Community Answer

Of course! Use whatever can clean your grill and is safe to do so. You can also use a sponge or a grill brush.

Helpful 1 Not Helpful 1

Question

How do you stop a burger from shrinking?



Community Answer

Press it down with either the spatula or griddle to flatten them and it'll help prevent shrinkage during cooking.

Helpful 2 Not Helpful 3



Warnings

- Ground meat is not considered fully cooked until its interior temperature is 160 °F (71 °C). If you'd like to make sure that your burger is fully cooked, insert a meat thermometer into its center. Keep in mind that fully cooking your burger will result in well-done beef. However, if meat isn't fully cooked through, you run the risk of

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wikiHow Staff
wikiHow Staff Writer

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