


# How to Have a Low Calorie Barbecue

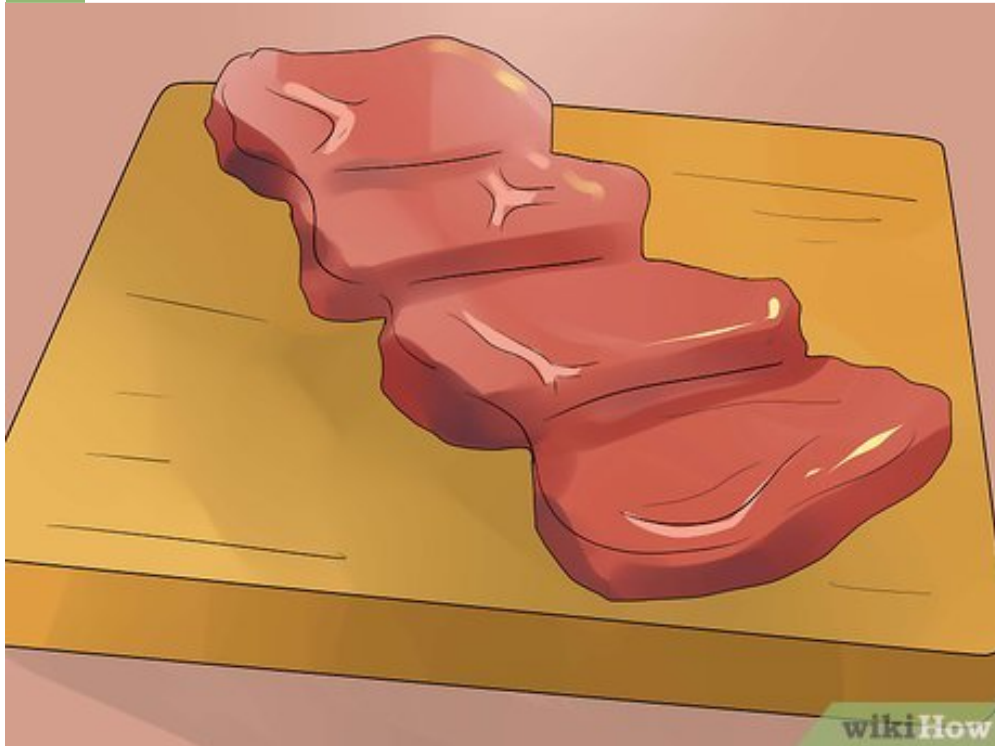
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When the weather gets warm, nothing is more fun than spending time with friends and family at a barbecue. If you are hosting a barbecue, you'll be in charge of serving a variety of foods to feed all your friends and family; however, if you or your guests are trying to watch your waistline, you might want to consider choosing healthier, low-calorie barbecue items. Generally, people consume more than the recommended daily intake of calories in a single barbecue meal. Many of the traditional barbecue items, like potato salad or hamburgers, can be overly high in calories and fat. Plan ahead to make some adjustments to your meals and side dishes so you can enjoy flavorful barbecue foods without the guilt!

## Part 1 of 3: Preparing Healthy BBQ Main Dishes



**1 Choose lean cuts of beef.** Whether it's hamburgers or steaks, beef is a common food to be served at barbecues. Make sure to choose leaner cuts of beef to help cut down on calories and fat.

- Some cuts of beef are much more lean compared to others. Choose cuts of beef that are naturally lean or make sure to read packaging information to choose lower fat ground beef.<sup>[1]</sup>
- If you want to make hamburgers for example, consider buying the 97% lean ground beef. This has significantly fewer calories and fat compared to the 80/20 ground beef. Or try making burgers with ground turkey meat instead. You could also try mixing grilled mushrooms into the meat to help cut it down.
- If you want to do steaks, try these naturally leaner cuts: flank, filet, sirloin tip, tri-tip, and top sirloin.<sup>[2]</sup>
- Also try organs and other tissues. Liver tends to have more micronutrients than muscle.
- Eating a lot of red meat increases the risk of bowel cancer. If you eat more than 90g of meat a day, it is recommended that you cut down.



**2 Consider grilling fish and seafood.** Both fish and shellfish are great to be grilled or barbecued. Like lean cuts of beef, they're a great choice if you're looking for lower calorie or healthier main dishes.

- All seafood is naturally lower in calories. Plus, those that do contain a little more fat (like salmon or tuna) contain heart-healthy fats like omega-3s.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Great fish to grill or barbecue include salmon, tuna, swordfish, cod, halibut, or mahi-mahi. Peppered tuna also ideal, full of omega 3 and 6. Fish like flounder or tilapia are much flakier and may crumble or break apart on a grill.
- Shellfish like shrimp, clams, or mussels can also be cooked on a grill or served at a barbecue.



**3 Cook naturally leaner proteins like poultry or pork.** Some protein sources in particular are very lean and low in calories. Pork and poultry are generally great as a low-calorie protein for barbecues.<sup>[4]</sup>

- Poultry, like chicken or turkey, are lean meats in general. Although dark meat does have more fat, both white and dark meats are still considered lean and low in calories.
- Pork, sometimes considered "the other white meat," is another one that's naturally very lean. This is especially true if you trim off any visible fat on cuts like pork chops; however, pork has been found to contain a significant amount of LDL cholesterol. Make sure you are choosing lean cuts (tenderloin and center-cut roasts) and limit the amount you eat. Avoid high-fat cuts like spareribs, sausage, and bacon.
- If you choose to go with poultry or pork, remove the skin or any visible fat to help reduce the overall calories of these lean protein sources.



**4 Try vegetarian main dishes.** If you want to offer a wider selection of main dishes, you may want to consider trying some vegetarian sources of protein. These are great for barbecues and are also a lower-calorie item.<sup>[5]</sup>

- There are a few different types of vegetarian proteins you can try. Both tofu and tempeh are great grilled or barbecued. They also stand up well to most cooking methods.
- In addition, these foods are low in calories, but still high in protein. They also soak up marinades and sauces and become very tasty and flavorful when cooked.

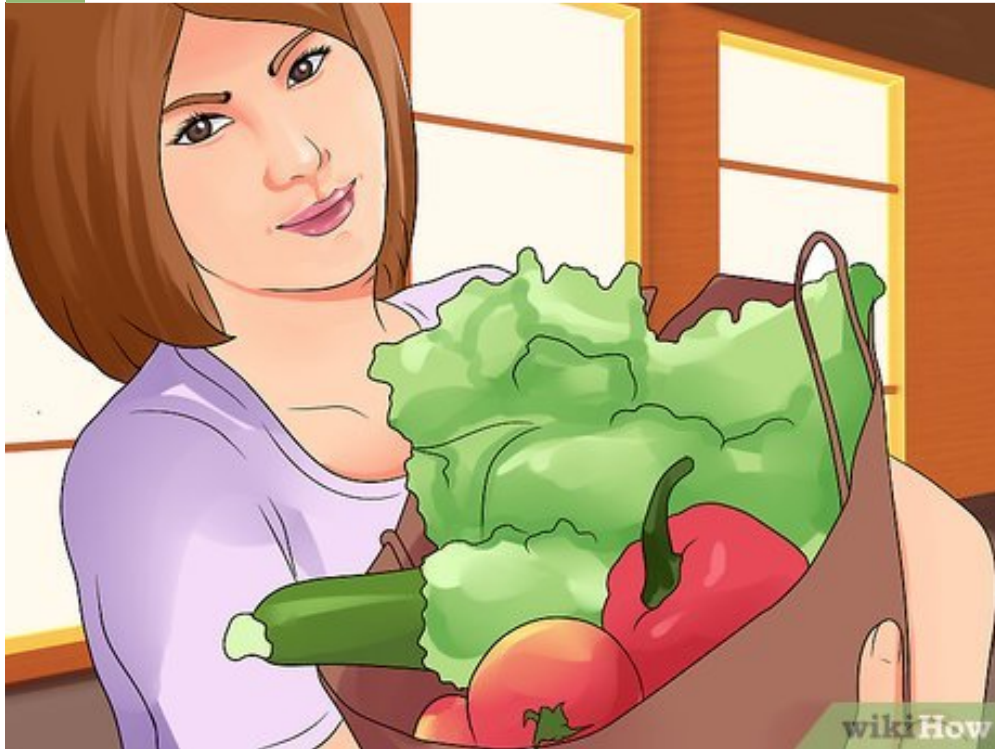


**5 Choose whole grains.** Whether is a hamburger or hot dog bun, you'll most likely need to serve some sort of roll or bread at your barbecue. Make sure to choose a more nutritious version of these grains.

- 100% whole grains are minimally processed and contain higher amounts of fiber, protein, and minerals. They're much more nutrient-dense compared to more refined grains (like white bread or rolls).<sup>[6]</sup>
- If you plan on serving hamburgers, pulled pork sandwiches, or hot dogs, purchase 100% whole grain buns. These aren't necessarily much lower in calories, but are more nutritious for you.
- If you want to avoid having a higher carb meal or just want to cut out the bread altogether, consider serving items that don't require a roll. Do [barbecue chicken](#), pork loin or steaks that generally are not served with a roll.
- Eating plenty of fiber is associated with a lower risk of heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes, and bowel cancer.



## Part 2 of 3: Cooking Nutritious Side Dishes for Your BBQ



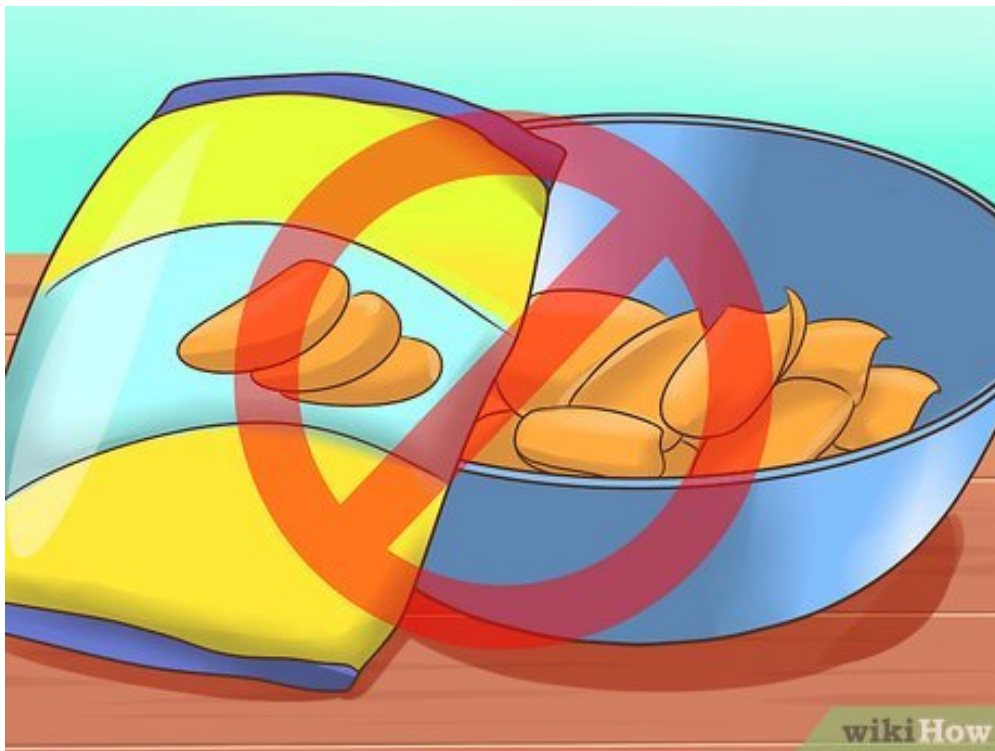
**1 Go for vegetables.** Vegetables are very versatile allowing you to cook and serve them in a variety of ways. Plus, they're an easy low-calorie side dish that you can serve at your barbecues.

- Vegetables are a great idea for your healthy and low-calorie barbecue. They're naturally very, very low in calories and high in fiber, vitamins and antioxidants.<sup>[7]</sup>
- Vegetables can be grilled or smoked or cooked inside in a variety of ways. They can be served hot, at room temperature, or even chilled. They'll fit a variety of your barbecue needs.
- Try serving vegetables in dishes like simple grilled vegetables (try a mix of zucchini, squash, or onions), cold vegetable salad, or even a simple spinach salad. Try barbecued sweet potato jackets with bean and spinach filling or cheesy corn on the cob.



- 2 Serve fruit as a side dish.** Another great warm-weather item is fruit. Like vegetables, this group is naturally lower in calories and can add a little bit of sweetness to your meal.
- Fruits are not only low in calories, but they're high in fiber, vitamins, and antioxidants as well. Warm weather fruits, like berries, are particularly high in antioxidants.<sup>[8]</sup>
  - You might think that sliced fruit or a fruit salad is the only way to go; however, a great way to boost the flavor of fruit is to grill it. Pineapple, peaches, or plums become decadent and indulgent when grilled.
  - However, a simple fruit salad, fruit kebabs, or even a watermelon and feta salad is a great way to use low-calorie fruit at a barbecue.





**3 Change up the standard chips and dip.** It's hard to throw a barbecue without some sort of crunchy chips. Many people serve the usual tortilla chips and guacamole or potato chips; however, be smart with your choices and pick out lower-calorie items.

- Potato chips, cheese puffs, and even tortilla chips can get high in calories — especially if you have more than one serving.<sup>[9]</sup> Choose not to serve these foods at your barbecue to help keep the calorie levels lower.
- If you want to serve an appetizer or a dip, try using something a little different. For example, you can serve raw vegetables with hummus, ranch dip, or guacamole instead of chips.
- If you do want to have one type of chip to serve, consider using the baked chips or ones that are 100% whole grain (like whole-wheat pita chips). These are slightly lower in calories and fat.
- Consider making beet chips instead. Slice them as thin as possible, drizzle with olive oil and bake in a hot oven until they are crisp.



**4 Make a lightened-up dessert recipe.** Warm weather desserts are generally cold, creamy, and high in calories. Be wary of the dessert items you serve to guests so you can keep the overall calories low.

- Think outside the box of the typical ice cream, ice cream sandwich, pie, or cake. This is especially true if you're buying those baked goods from the store or pre-made. These can have higher levels of saturated or trans fat compared to homemade.<sup>[10]</sup>
- Consider purchasing 100% fruit sorbet or [making your own sorbet](#) or granita at home. These items are still nice and cold for a warm day, but are much lower in calories compared to ice cream.
- You can also serve fruit with a sprinkle of cinnamon, chopped mint, and a dollop of whipped cream for a lightened-up dessert as well.
- If you want, you could also make your own popsicles with greek yogurt, fruit, and spices. These are perfect for warm days when you're hosting a barbecue.



**5 Choose better condiments.** Condiments like mayo or ketchup generally make an appearance on a barbecue table; however, make sure you choose and serve lower-calorie condiments.

- Some of the lowest calorie condiments include: ketchup, mustard, low-fat mayo, hot sauce, soy sauce, salsa, horseradish, relish, and steak sauce.<sup>[11]</sup>
- Always measure out the appropriate serving size as well. It's generally 1 – 2 tablespoons per serving. 1 – 2 tablespoons is about the size of a ping pong ball.
- Choosing toppings that are vegetable-based is a great idea. Ketchup or salsa are not only low in calories, but do contain nutrients from the tomatoes and other vegetables they're made from.



**6 Drink adequate water.** If it's a hot day outside, you'll likely be feeling a little thirsty at your barbecue. Instead of filling up on sweetened high-calorie beverages, stick to low-calorie items.

- Instead of grabbing a sweet tea or high-calorie alcoholic drink, try to stick to lower-calorie items. They'll hydrate you much better and help keep your total calories in check.<sup>[12]</sup>
- Try water, sparkling water, flavored water, diet iced tea, low-calorie beers, or infused waters.
- If it's a particularly hot day, make sure you stay hydrated. Aim for a total of 64 oz of water during the day. If you're planning on having some alcohol at your barbecue, still make sure to consume adequate water.<sup>[13]</sup>

## Part 3 of 3: Avoiding High-Calorie BBQ Foods



**1 Steer clear of fatty meats.** Although there are plenty of great meats and protein sources that are low-calorie, there are some that you should avoid. This is especially true if you're aiming to have a low-calorie barbecue.

- Some cuts of meat are overly fatty and high in calories. Serving these items can increase your total calorie intake but also increase your intake of unhealthy fats like saturated fats.<sup>[14]</sup>
- Fatty, high-calorie meats to stay away from include hot dogs, 80/20 ground beef, sausages or brats, fatty steaks like a prime rib or NY strip, and chicken wings.
- Also, note that when you cooked higher fat meats over high heat (like on a grill), toxic compounds called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons are formed. This comes from the fat dripping onto the coals and smoking.
- The occasional meal that's high in fat is OK; however, if you eat these continuously, the high saturated fat content can lead to increased cholesterol levels over time.





**2 Avoid high-fat mayonnaise-based dishes.** Coleslaw and potato salad are common side dishes at barbecues. They're creamy, crunchy, and delicious; however, they're also sky high in calories and fat.<sup>[15]</sup>

- When you're planning out your barbecue menu, you might be thinking of serving one of these types of salads. To help keep your total calorie levels lower, consider using other types of dressing or swapping out the mayo for something a little lighter.
- Make healthier, lower-calorie swaps for the traditional potato salad, macaroni salad, coleslaw, or tuna salads.
- For example, instead of regular mayo, consider using low-fat mayo or the one made from olive oil. And use less than the recipe calls for. You can also try using low-fat yogurt or Greek yogurt in place of the mayo. It's still creamy and rich but with much fewer calories.
- Also consider changing up your typical dressing. Although a creamy potato salad is great, try tossing it with a vinaigrette instead. The same goes for macaroni salad or coleslaw.
- Also increase the vegetable ratio in these salads. Not that potatoes or pasta is unhealthy, but they are higher in calorie compared to vegetables. Increase the amount of onion, celery, or other vegetables found in these recipes.





**3 Limit high-calorie toppings and dressings.** Other sneaky ways you may end up overdoing it with calories are through toppings and dressings. Whether it's a squirt of ketchup on your burger or extra BBQ sauce to dip, it's important to watch out for these calorie-heavy condiments.<sup>[16]</sup>

- You may overdo it with condiments, sauces, and dressings because these are hard to measure out. In addition, you may not be aware of how calorie-dense they are.
- Watch out for these condiments that are particularly high in calories: mayonnaise, creamy dressings and dips, tartar sauce, BBQ sauce, and honey mustard.
- Always try to measure appropriate portion sizes — even if you just estimate them. Serve yourself 2 tablespoons maximum of a condiment. That's about the size of a ping pong ball.



**4 Watch out for high-calorie beverages.** When you're planning on what beverages you're going to serve at your barbecue, also be aware that some drinks have more calories than others. Be mindful of what you choose to have.

- Many drinks are high in calories due to the sugar content they contain.<sup>[17]</sup> You may not realize how many calories or sugar you've consumed when it's coming from a beverage.
- Beverages that are typically high in calories include alcohol, fruit juices, sweet teas, lemonade, and regular sodas.
- If you do have a higher-calorie drink, stick to one only. This allows you to indulge a little, but doesn't push you over the top calorie-wise.



### Tips

- In addition to cooking healthier foods for your barbecue, make sure to stick to slightly smaller portion sizes. This can help cut down on overall calories.
- Try to limit creamy sauces, salads, or other dishes. These will automatically have a higher amount of calories.
- Also be aware of beverages. They can end up totaling a lot of calories.

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