

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

June 2, 2006

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:makeith@ifas.ufl.edu**It's Grilling Season - Go Safely!**

Here's June all ready, Father's Day is just around the corner. The grill is on the patio, ready to fire up at a moment's notice, right? Many people are grilling more and more of their meals all year round. Besides the fact that grilled foods taste great, it's easy to clean up after grilling. With few pots and pans, just wipe off the grill and you're ready to start over again. Plus, cooking outside means there's less heat in the house. And Mom doesn't mind not standing over a hot stove! So, what's there to worry about?

Depending on how you do it, there could be very little to worry about, or there could be a lot. Let's start with the problem that not enough people worry about - food safety. Millions of people suffer from one kind or another of food poisoning every year. Most of this suffering could easily be avoided by a few easy steps. Whether you fire up the grill on the back patio or on the beach, along with the long handled fork, the gloves and the spray bottle, add a food thermometer to your tools.

Digital food thermometers cost a few dollars more than dial types. But the advantages are that you only have to get the tip of the probe into the middle of your piece of meat. That's great when you're grilling burgers or thin pork chops. If you use a dial thermometer at least 2 inches of the probe must be inside the meat for an accurate reading. That means you have to stick it into the side of burger, which can be a real hassle, not to mention the damage done to the burger!

The other advantage of digitals is that they work a lot faster, usually within a few seconds. Dial thermometers take longer to reach their final temperature, and you must

wait till the needle stops moving to be sure.

The other problem that comes with grilling can also be avoided or at least made much less by using that thermometer. It is well established that people who eat lots of grilled meats, especially if the meat is well-done, are more likely to get cancer. Colon, rectal, liver, stomach, prostate and breast cancers have all been tied to grilled meats.

The high heat, combined with the dry cooking method, turns some of the proteins in meat into cancer-causing agents. So far over 20 different individual compounds have been identified, but there are probably 100's that haven't been found yet. These compounds tie onto our DNA and turn healthy cells into cancer cells.

One way to cut down on the amount of these compounds in your grilled meat is to not over-cook it. Use that thermometer to tell when it's done just enough. **Ground beef and pork chops are done when the middle hits 160° F. Steaks are safe at 145° F, and chicken is done at 165° F.** You can't tell by looking at it if the burger is safe. About 1/3 of the burgers that look brown or grey the whole way through are not hot enough to be safe, and about 1/3 of the ones that are still pink are safe! Many people overcook meats "just to be safe". Using a thermometer can eliminate the tough, dry, over-cooked chops and can let you have your burgers still pink in the middle, while making sure they are all safe.

Be sure to use two plates, one for carrying raw meats to the grill, and a clean one to carry the cooked meat to your hungry, waiting fans. Don't spread bacteria in raw meat juice!

Another way to reduce the amount of cancer-causing compounds is keep the meat moist. That means marinating it before you cook it. Here's an easy marinade for

steaks, chops or chicken. Marinate chicken for several hours, steaks and chops as long as overnight if you want. Discard any leftover marinade after you take the meat out.

Lemon Grilling Sauce or Marinade

½ C lemon juice

¼ C salad or olive oil

1 clove garlic

½ tsp salt

2 Tbsp grated onion

½ tsp black pepper

1 tsp Worcestershire sauce

½ to 1 tsp hot pepper sauce

Mash the garlic clove with the salt. Add rest of ingredients and mix well. Put meat in zipper-seal plastic bag. Add ½ cup of marinade. Seal bag and refrigerate, turning once or twice. Save rest of sauce to brush on meat while grilling. Grill meat until thermometer registers the appropriate temperature. Brush with the remaining sauce once or twice while cooking . Enjoy your safe meat!

Hillsborough County Extension is a cooperative service of the Hillsborough County Board of County Commissioners and the University of Florida.

The Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences is an Equal Employment Opportunity - Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, sex, age, handicap or national origin. COOPERATIVE EXTENSION IN AGRICULTURE, HOME ECONOMICS, STATE OF FLORIDA, IFAS, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, AND BOARDS OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS COOPERATING