

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Delicious as pork is, some people hesitate to cook anything other than ribs.

That's unfortunate because pork can be tender and juicy. But if you are old enough, you remember the days when all pork was over-cooked to almost shoe leather status. Because the parasite that causes trichinosis was so common, the recommendation was to cook all pork well-done. Most homes didn't have meat thermometers, so cautious homemakers were told to cook it until no pink was visible. Safety conscious cooks went even further, often cooking pork until it was dry and tough. That is not necessary!

With changes in the methods used to raise hogs, the trichinosis parasite has practically disappeared from commercially raised pork. It's still around, but mostly in wild game such as bear, hog and venison, or in home-raised pigs. Meat from those animals does need to be cooked thoroughly, hot enough to kill the parasites. But some years ago the recommended temperature for cooking pieces of pork was lowered to 145°F, instead of 160°F. This is known to be hot enough to kill the bacteria that could make us sick. On the other hand, it's still cool enough that you can have juicy meat that's even pink in the center. The trick is to use your meat thermometer. And if you still don't have one, it's time to go get one!

After these years of relatively few reports of food poisoning from pork, unfortunately it's back in the news again. But still, the bacteria that have recently been showing up on pork are all killed if the meat is cooked properly. These recent reports

have found both 'regular' Staphylococcus bacteria and the MRSA kind on raw pork.

MRSA bacteria are the ones that do not respond to even the best antibiotics our doctors have. They often don't cause food poisoning as much as severe skin, blood and even internal organ infections. Because they are resistant to so many kinds of antibiotics, some people are blaming their presence on antibiotic use in the farms. With that in mind, they then think that if they buy fresh meat labeled as 'antibiotic free' or 'raised without antibiotics', they won't have to worry. But the researchers at the University of Iowa who tested raw pork products found that whether the animals were raised with or without antibiotics made no difference. The bacteria were found on both kinds of meat.

So, if you like your pork chops, a good pork roast, or even a pulled pork sandwich, here are some extra tips for handling the raw pork safely. They are pretty standard recommendations, but repeating them one more time is worth it. First, keep raw pork and all raw meats separate from other foods, including other raw meats, poultry and fish. Don't give the nasty little bugs a chance to jump ship onto another food! That includes not letting juices from raw meat touch other foods. And don't use the same plate for cooked meat that you used for raw meat.

Because this bacteria can cause problems even if it doesn't go in on our food, it's a good idea to wear plastic disposable gloves to handle raw pork. Be sure to wear gloves if you have any cuts or open sores on your hands. The bacteria could get into your blood through cuts and cause plenty of problems.

Finally, check the temperature of all pork that you cook. Pieces of pork (chops, roasts, etc.) need to be at least 145°F in the middle. Ground pork, whether it's in raw

sausage or in a meatloaf blend, has to get to at least 160°F to be safe. If you cook pork in the microwave, be sure to rotate the dish during cooking, leave it sit for 5 minutes at the end so the temperature can even out, and use that thermometer to be sure.

Last but not least, wash your hands! Wash all your utensils and cooking equipment well too, especially anything that touched raw meat or juices. Then sit down and enjoy these delicious pork chops! Make a big salad while they cook too. Enjoy!

Suwanee County Pork Chops

3 Tbsp vegetable oil	5 center cut chops, cut 1" thick
1 onion, chopped	1 14-oz can diced tomatoes
1 10-oz can tomato sauce with green chilies	1 cup water
Salt and pepper to taste (about ½ tsp each)	

Heat oil in large skillet. Brown chops on both sides. Add onion, stir and cook 2 minutes. Add diced tomatoes and tomato sauce, water and seasonings. Stir to mix. Cover and simmer over low heat 1 ½ hrs, until chops register 145°F in thickest part. Sauce should be slightly thickened. Stir occasionally as needed. Serve over brown rice. Serves 5.