

# Boiling Point: Healthy (And Unhealthy) Cooking Methods

While we all focus on what we eat as being the most important part of our diet, the fact is that if we cook our food wrong, we are removing all the nutrients from the food anyway, rendering them useless. *How* you cook your food is as important, especially when you're cooking meat. A lot has been spoken about cooking meat at high temperatures and what it can do to your insides. In fact, if you grill your meat to a blackened mess it could be just as bad for your body as smoking! So while there are plenty of [cooking gadgets](#) in the kitchen to make the most of now, they could be unsanitary and unsafe! So here are the worst, and best, ways to cook your food and what you can do to get the most out of your meals.



## Simmering Food

A common way to cook over a long period of time, and there's a lot of people who leave meat on a stove to simmer for hours. It's not the best approach to keeping your meats nutrient dense because it denatures the proteins. Denatured proteins are not toxic but the more denatured it gets, your body is not able to make the most of what you are eating. Denatured

proteins can contribute to a [decrease in your gut bacteria](#), but the food is also being rendered useless in your body because you are unable to digest it properly. Simmering your food also prevents fats from oxidizing, more on that later.

## **Sous Vide**

The method of cooking food in a water bath is used a lot by professional chefs and is a great way to make meat melt in the mouth, but the main risk with cooking food in, essentially a plastic bag, means that BPA, as well as other compounds, can seep into your food. Ultimately it boils down to how you feel, but if you are cooking an item of food in this method for an extended period of time, under a high heat, it could mean more plastic seeping into your food than you would care for.

## **Slow Cooking**

Yes, even this nifty time saver has a few issues. Slow cooking for extended periods of time produces over cooked meat as well as glutamate (not to be confused with monosodium glutamate), which is one of the essential amino acids and is essential to your brain. Amino acids are the building blocks of protein, so it's important if you want to retain the benefits of a high protein meal. If you find slow cooking to be a lifesaver, you need to make sure that you cook your food correctly by keeping the food covered tightly. But also make sure you use a lot of antioxidant spices, such as rosemary and turmeric. And add some vitamin C powder (also known as [ascorbic acid](#)), if you are planning to slow cook for a very long period of time such as 12 to 24 hours.



## Broiling

By cooking your food under a high direct heat for a short period of time, this is a great way to cook meat quickly.

However, it is the biggest culprit of denaturing the proteins. Broiling also tends to oxidize the fats. Fats, especially polyunsaturated ones, are very sensitive to heat and when heated, the oil will produce a [compound called dicarbonyl](#) which can cause cell mutations and may also contribute to cancer. Broiling isn't an ideal method for cooking vegetables because it will dry them out very easily and remove all the nutrient value.

## Barbecue

While a wonderful way to spend a summer's day is to barbecue meat over an open flame, there are many issues with this cooking method. When the fats of the meat hit the coals, they form what is called HCA's and PAH's which is a major cause of inflammation and could contribute towards cancer. Barbecuing is also a big cause of food poisoning, and if the meat is not cooked thoroughly, it could result in outbreaks of Salmonella, [E-coli outbreaks](#), and Campylobacter. As barbecuing is a massive contributor towards food poisoning because of the raw or undercooked meat, you need to make sure you thoroughly test

your meat using a thermometer before serving up. Or if you are looking for a method which creates a taste and texture similar to barbecuing, you could grill your meats at a lower temperature.

## Charring

Blackening or burning your meat will oxidize the fat molecules causing them to be inflammatory. Oxidizing fats will also disrupt your hormonal signaling which can interrupt your [sensitivity to insulin](#) which will make you gain weight, as well as produce substances that are carcinogenic when consumed in high quantities.

## Deep Frying

The method of cooking your food in oil at extremely high temperatures means you are covering your food in oxidized fats, as well as denaturing the proteins, and can increase the number of toxic compounds that could increase your risk of cancer. While deep fried foods are incredibly tasty, it's very important to cook your food in healthy ways. And if you need to try your food make sure you use oils that have a [higher smoking point](#), such as olive oil.

Now while all these methods run the extreme risk of affecting your health, there are methods that will prove to be beneficial for lots of foods. While they say applying heat to any food can reduce approximately 15 to 20% of vitamins in vegetables, there are some studies that suggest that specific foods can benefit from some cooking. Three notable examples are tomatoes, carrots, and spinach. The heat helps the foods to release antioxidants by breaking down their cell walls, making them enter the body easier. So here are some healthy cooking measures to bear in mind.



## Microwaving

This is a controversial one because zapping your food at a high temperature has been shown to cause changes in your [HDL and LDL cholesterol](#) as well as your white blood cells. But because of the short cooking times, it means there is the minimal destruction of the key nutrients. And as microwaves cook food by heating them from the inside out, it's also being shown to be one of the best ways to keep the most amount of vitamins in vegetables. Broccoli, for example, in the microwave, keeps its vitamin C.



## Stir-frying

A great method for cooking vegetables, it's a useful approach to keeping the flavor and while oil can be used, you could substitute for healthier oil such as coconut oil to give your vegetables and meats a nice coconutty flavor, as well as maintain the vitamins.

## Boiling

Comparing this method to frying or eating raw it has actually been showing that boiling certain vegetables, such as carrots and broccoli, could be the best way to keep its nutrients. Be aware that the high temperatures, as well as the large volume of water used, can wash away the water soluble vitamins as well as 60 to 70% of minerals in some foods. However, it's a quick way to cook your food.

## Poaching

Cooking anything in a small amount of hot water just below the boiling point is an excellent way to [cook delicate food such as fish or eggs](#) and although it may take a bit longer than normal methods this method means that it will decrease the amount of nutrients leaving the food.

## Steaming

Probably the most effective method of cooking anything, steaming any type of food from vegetables to meat allows them to retain all of their vitamins and nutrients, while also allowing them to stew in their own juices and flavors. Steaming is also an excellent way to retain moisture in the food. By going on an exclusively steamed method of cooking your foods, you may feel a lot better because of the high amount of vitamins retained. It's always advisable to add a bit of seasoning to these foods, such as lemon juice or a sprinkle of salt or pepper.

## No Cooking At All!

The diet that had the most press in recent years is [the raw food diet](#) as there have been many studies suggesting that by not cooking food at all will reduce the risk of cancer. But when it comes to assessing the raw food diet, people that are exclusively eating a raw food diet rich in plants will naturally have more vitamins and minerals as well as fiber.

So if you ramp up your raw food intake, you will naturally have these additional vitamins and minerals in your diet.

As the jury is still out on what is the best method and what is the worst method, the fact is that none of these cooking methods will replace a rich and varied diet. The importance of how we cook our food does have a massive impact on the state of our health. And if you take one lesson away, it's this, to enjoy the various cooking methods and listen to your body! We are all different and what works for one person doesn't work for another. Ultimately we need to retain as much of the vitamins in our food as we can to benefit from them.

If you are relying on cooking methods that deplete your foods of these vitamins and minerals, you need to start thinking about more varied methods of how you cook your food.