

*Guide
to...*

Degree of
doneness...



getting it right

There are many variables at work when deciding if meat is cooked. The size, shape and thickness of the meat play a role, as does the cut, fat and bone content. Even the pre-cooking temperature of the meat and the shape and type of cooking dish can have an effect on achieving the perfect degree of doneness.

The following techniques can work together or independently to calculate doneness.

- Use weight/temperature and time recommendations only as a guide.
- Towards the end of the recommended cooking time, judge the meat's readiness by using the 'touch test' method. Press the outside centre of the meat lightly with tongs. If it feels soft and springy it's in the medium rare range. Medium feels slightly firm and springy. Any firmer to touch and it's on its way to well done. This method of judging doneness is particularly useful when grilling, barbecuing or pan-frying meat such as steaks.
- To remove all guesswork, particularly when cooking roasts, use a meat thermometer. It is the easiest and most accurate way to determine the degree of doneness.

Guide to...

Residual heat – the critical factor

It is important to note that while the meat rests the residual heat continues to raise the core temperature of the meat, particularly roasts. This can increase the internal temperature by 2°C-4°C for small joints after five to 10 minutes, and 4°C-10°C for larger joints after 15 to 20 minutes.

It's a good practice to take the roast or steaks from the oven or barbecue just shy of the degree of doneness goal (about 3°C-6°C less than the desired temperature). The resting time allows the roast or steak to finish cooking and the juices to set.



Types of meat thermometers

There are several types of meat thermometers, but all measure the internal core temperature (ICT).

Leave-in thermometers are inserted into the thickest part of the roast for the duration of cooking. These thermometers have a thicker probe. When using a leave-in thermometer, insert it in the meat before placing the roast in the oven so the cut surface seals during cooking. The probe should be inserted into the thickest part of the meat, and it shouldn't touch bone or fatty areas (which hold more heat).

Instant-read thermometers are inserted during cooking to obtain a temperature and then removed. Insert it into the thickest part of the roast (avoiding bone) and wait about 30 seconds for it to register accurately. If the roast is within 10 degrees of your aim, begin checking it every five minutes or so. Do not leave these thermometers in the meat for more than 30 or 40 seconds and do not put them in the oven.

Digital probe thermometers are the latest kitchen tools. These thermometers have a thin sensor that probes the meat and is left in while it cooks. The sensor is attached to a wire that runs out of the oven door to a small unit that gives you a constant reading of the ICT. And with remote digital thermometers you don't even need to be near the kitchen, they page you when the meat is ready.



Guide to...

How to determine doneness with a thermometer

The degree of doneness for both large and small cuts of meat is always measured at the very centre of the cut.

It is sometimes difficult to determine doneness of odd-shaped meats, as heat will not penetrate all areas at the same time. If necessary take readings in two places and average the temperatures.

Stuffed and rolled meats have more layers for the heat to penetrate, so they require longer cooking times and can be difficult to judge for doneness. Different types of stuffing also alter cooking times and internal core temperature. Stuffed and rolled meats are best cooked to well done, and it's also best to take readings in two places and average the temperatures.

Why all meat should rest after cooking

All red meat should rest after it comes off the heat. The time depends on the size of the cut: a roast is best rested for 10 to 35 minutes while steaks or chops should stand for at least two to five minutes.

As meat is cooked, the proteins heat up and coagulate, which pushes the juices toward the centre. This is why doneness can be judged by prodding it with tongs – the firmer the meat, the more 'done' it is. Allowing the meat to stand away from the heat before serving enables the juices to redistribute and be reabsorbed. As a result the meat will lose less liquid when you cut it and be far more tender and juicy.

For more information on degree of doneness, refer to page 11.15-11.17.



Roast lamb rump with a balsamic syrup served with roasted beetroot and artichokes