

It's Heart Healthy Grilling Time

by Kari McDonnough, CDM, Director of Dietary Services and Nutrition

Grilling is a great way to spend more time outdoors with friends and family, whether you're barbecuing or grilling the Thanksgiving turkey. If you live in the south, it is always the season for fun and backyard barbecues! Here are some grilling safety tips and healthy nutrition options to make your next meal one to remember.



Grill Cleaning and Safety

Make sure your grill is clean before you begin cooking. According to the [National Fire Protection Association](#), the number one cause of gas grill fires is a failure to clean the barbecue grill. "Every model is different, so cleaning recommendations will vary," says Kari McDonnough, Baylor Hamilton Heart and Vascular Hospital Director of Dietary Services and Nutrition. "Follow your manufacturer's suggestions when selecting a cleaning method and products." After cleaning, it's time to cook. Let the grill heat up to eliminate potential bacteria. Check the burner openings on a gas grill to make sure no buildup exists for a safe ignition and even flame. So what will you cook — hot dogs, hamburgers, chicken? These are traditional favorites. Consider other lean and healthy, tasty alternatives just right for the grill.

Healthy Grilling Suggestions

1 . Add Vegetables to the Menu

"It's hard to go wrong with vegetables. They bring flavor and nutrition to any meal," says McDonnough. Baste and season vegetables such as peppers, corn, eggplant or onions with herbs and place on a hot grill until they are tender. You can also moisten zucchini, tomatoes and carrots with a little water and seasoning. Wrap them up in heavy-duty aluminum foil, place on the grill, and check for tenderness.

2. Reduce the Fat

When we think about burgers, ground beef usually comes to mind. A healthier option is the turkey burger. Ground turkey breast can be very lean, up to 99 percent fat-free. Be creative and add cilantro, shallots or chili sauce into patties for your very own flavor-enhanced burger. For a Greek-style burger, mix in feta cheese, Kalamata olives, oregano, and pepper. Serve on a pita.

3. Dessert Can Be Healthy, Too

Don't forget dessert to top off your meal. "Yes, dessert can be healthy. Consider fruit and combine it with something sweet," McDonnough says. Grill fruit kebabs made up of

pineapple slices or peach halves on low heat until the fruit is hot and slightly golden. Place the fruit on top of a scoop of low-fat ice cream or angel food cake as a nutritious alternative to more standard "desserts."

A Must-Have: The Food Thermometer

Don't depend on sight or smell to determine if food is safe to eat. An essential grilling accessory is the food thermometer. It helps prevent food poisoning by ensuring food is cooked to the proper temperature. When purchasing a thermometer, read the package label carefully. Pick one designed to use with meat, and consider stainless steel along with a shatterproof lens and easy-to-read dial.

Can Grilling Cause Cancer?

U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) research suggests a link between cancer and charred meats and fish. The result of high-temperature grilling, charring can be prevented.

McDonnough recommends you remove fatty areas before cooking and re-cook meat in the microwave before placing it on the grill. If you're using a charcoal grill, make sure the coal briquettes are not directly below the meat. "You don't want it to be well-done or burnt," she cautions.

Here's to happiness and good health!