

Burgers

Food safety advice when preparing burgers at home and when eating burgers in restaurants

Preparing burgers safely at home

Always cook burgers thoroughly, whether you're cooking them on the barbecue or in the kitchen. Burgers served rare or undercooked may contain harmful bacteria that could cause [food poisoning](#).

Before serving your burgers, always check that:

- they're steaming hot all the way through
- when you cut into the centre, none of the meat is pink
- any juices run clear

It's also important to remember to avoid cross-contamination by:

- covering raw meat and keeping it separate from ready-to-eat food
- using a dish that will prevent spillages
- storing raw meat on the bottom shelf of your fridge
- using different utensils, plates and chopping boards for raw and cooked food
- or washing them thoroughly between tasks
- [washing your hands](#) after touching raw meat and before you handle ready-to-eat food

Why a burger isn't like a steak

Harmful bacteria can be carried on the surface of whole cuts of meat. When a rare steak is seared these bacteria are killed, making the steak safe to eat.

When meat is minced to produce burgers, any harmful bacteria from the surface of the raw meat spread throughout the burger. Unless the burger is cooked right through, these bacteria can remain alive on the inside. This applies to all burgers, including burgers made from good quality or expensive meat.

That's why a burger needs to be served well done, while a steak can be served rare.

How bacteria get onto meat

While it is being produced, meat can become contaminated with bacteria, including harmful ones like [E. coli O157](#) and [salmonella](#). The main source of these bacteria is the intestines of the animal. When animals are slaughtered, there is potential for E. coli O157 and other bacteria from the animal's gut to contaminate the surface of the meat

Even the very best quality meat carries bacteria

Contamination can happen right at the start of the process, when animals are slaughtered. There is no way of knowing which animals are carrying harmful bacteria in their gut.

The quality of the meat you buy doesn't make any difference to the potential risk of contamination.

[Avoiding cross-contamination](#)

Eating rare burgers in restaurants

Some restaurants are able to put in place strict controls over the way their burgers are produced and cooked. These controls mean that the risk from burgers that are pink in the middle is significantly reduced.

You need to remember that there is still risk involved whenever a burger isn't thoroughly cooked, even in restaurants with strict controls in place.

That's why we advise that anyone who is more vulnerable to food poisoning should only ever eat burgers that are thoroughly cooked.

This applies to:

- children
- the elderly
- pregnant women
- people with a weakened immune system

[View The safe production of beef burgers in catering establishments as PDF \(864.99 KB\)](#)

[E. coli cross-contamination guidance for businesses](#)