

## How to Cook Pork

### Today's Pork Can Be Cooked Medium and It's Perfectly Safe

By [Danilo Alfaro](#)

One of the most common misconceptions about pork is that it needs to be cooked well-done. For many years, that meant cooking it to an internal temperature of 160°F. Any sign of pink in a grilled pork chop or roasted pork loin was cause for alarm.

Unfortunately, that means that generations of people have grown up accustomed to eating overcooked pork. It is the only way they had ever tasted it. And believe me, it does not matter what kind of sauce you serve with it — a pork loin roasted to 160°F is going to be tough, dry, and thoroughly flavorless.

The good news is, it does not have to be that way.

The reason so many people learn that pork needs to be cooked until there is no pink whatsoever is because of a disease called Trichinosis. Caused by a parasitic worm called *Trichinella* that was prevalent in pork during the 1930s and 1940s, trichinosis was a very unpleasant disease which could sometimes be fatal. Back then, the way people could be confident that their pork was not contaminated was to cook it to 160°F, which would kill the *Trichinella*.

Incidentally, whoever came up with 160° was being overly cautious. *Trichinella* is actually killed at 137°F. So for all those years, we have been needlessly adding more than 20 degrees of temperature to our pork, drastically overcooking it, for no good reason.

Moreover, in the ensuing decades, thanks to strict laws governing how pork is raised and handled, the prevalence of *Trichinella* in pork plummeted, to the point where, by the mid-1990s it had been pretty much totally eradicated.

Even so, people kept right on cooking their pork to 160°F, despite the fact that 160°F was too high to begin with, and *Trichinella* had been wiped out in any case. It was just the way they had always been told to cook pork. If their parents or grandparents were around in the '40s and '50s, chances are they learned to cook pork that way and just kept passing it on.

It certainly did not help matters that the USDA continued to advise people to cook pork to a minimum internal temperature of 160°F.

That is, until 2011, when they updated their recommendations. Now the USDA says it is safe to cook pork to 145°F, which is in effect, medium as opposed to well-done. Pork cooked medium might look a little bit pink in the middle, but that is perfectly all right. In fact, it is great.

My own personal preference for cooking pork is 135° to 140°F. But even if you stick to the 145° guideline, your pork is going to be much more tender, juicy and flavorful than you've ever tasted, if you've only ever tasted pork that was cooked to 160°F.

And remember, because of a phenomenon called carry-over cooking, you want to take your pork roast out of the oven when it is 5 to 10 degrees below your target temperature, as the meat's temperature will continue to rise after you take it out of the oven. The bigger the piece of meat, and the higher your cooking temperature, the greater this effect will be.

One final note: The new guidelines only apply to whole pork cuts like chops, roasts and so on. Ground pork, like all ground meats, still needs to be cooked to 160°F.

So that is it. Pork is safe to eat when cooked to 140° to 145°F. Now get out there and enjoy some juicy pork roasts and chops. Here are a few recipes to get you started:

