

## 12 Healthy BBQ Tips

The author of [Clean Plates NYC](#) offers tips for keeping healthy during BBQ season - including a couple vegetarian BBQ tricks.



*With summer upon us, barbecue season is getting into full swing. Jared Koch, nutritionist and author of [Clean Plates NYC](#) has these tips for how to incorporate healthier eating into your BBQs this summer:*

One of the primary messages I try and get across to my clients and in Clean Plates is that because we are a nation overly obsessed with quantity (think high calorie, low carb, high protein, low salt etc.) we often overlook the more important aspect of the quality of food we are eating. Simply improving the quality of the same foods you are used to eating can have profound positive effects on your health.

Here are some examples of how to do this during your summer BBQs:

### Choose Healthy Meats

#### 1. Remember: Healthy animals make healthy meats

The best type of meat to consume is sustainably raised – ideally pasture-raised and grass-fed beef and free-range chicken. When the animals are raised in their natural environment (i.e. roaming in the pasture, feeding off the grass, exposed to the sun) they are the healthiest and therefore have more nutrients and are better for us. By consuming sustainably raised animals you will also be avoiding the negative effects of excess hormones and antibiotics. This plus the moral and environmental considerations makes this one of the most important steps towards eating healthier and more sustainably.

#### 2. Sustain yourself with sustainable fish

For fish you want to buy wild or organic farm-raised fish. You should try to minimize swordfish and tuna which have a higher concentration of mercury and focus on fish like cod or salmon which are higher in healthy Omega 3 fatty acids.

*Editor's Note: The Daily Green recommends going beyond the choice of farmed vs. wild, since many farmed species are not raised sustainably (raising predatory fish requires fishing for massive amounts of small fish to feed them, and raising fish in rivers can introduce diseases to wild populations) and aren't necessarily free of chemicals (depending on what they are fed). For more information about choosing sustainable fish, see Greener Choices' [guide to fish labels](#).*

## Cook Meat Safely

#### 3. Take care with cancer-causing char

Not only should you improve the quality of the animals you are consuming but also the cooking methods you use to prepare them. The temperature at which you cook your meat and the way you eat it – ie. well-done, rare, medium-rare, etc. – is also extremely important to focus on.

You should avoid cooking your meat at a very high temperature over long periods of time – hazards with over-cooking meats at high temperatures include an increased risk of cancers due to chemicals called [HCAs](#) – a study showed people

who ate well-done steaks were [60% more likely](#) to get pancreatic cancer than those who ate less-cooked meats. In addition over cooked meats tend to be harder to digest.

#### 4. Alter your cooking methods

Try cooking the meats medium rare and removing any blackened or charred pieces, the worst parts for you. You can cook the meat partially in oven before putting it on the grill to cut down cooking time which gives the HCAs less time to form. Or, cook smaller pieces which cook more quickly.

#### 5. Use alcohol *before* you start eating

With marinades it is best to use a thin coating to avoid charring. Also, marinating in red wine or beer for six hours prior to grilling has been shown to substantially reduce amount of HCAs. You can add high antioxidant fruits like blueberries or cherries into the meats prior to cooking as well. Using olive oil, lemon and garlic can also lower HCA levels.

#### 6. Elevate your cooking experience

Another way to reduce exposure to the HCAs is not to cook directly on the coals, but to use a rack or cedar plank. Salmon is especially tasty on a cedar plank. (For the most sustainable, safe salmon, The Daily Green recommends choosing [wild-caught Alaskan salmon](#).)

#### 7. Reconsider the hot dog

Especially avoid processed meats with nitrates like hot dogs, and bratwurst, which are some of the worst offenders when it comes to HCAs. Look for nitrate-free hot dogs or ones made from grass-fed beef if you do choose to indulge.

## Go Vegetarian, At Least With Your BBQ Side Dishes

#### 8. Skip the chips

When it comes to side dishes, go for the greens. Make sure to complement any meal with lots of vegetables – especially green leafy veggies like kale or spinach, and preferably some raw as well as cooked. Green leafy vegetables provides your body with nutrients to counteract some of the harmful effects of the other foods at a BBQ. Summertime is a great time to find locally grown and organic produce in abundance since it is a great time for farmers markets.

#### 9. Buffer your indulgences

A good rule of thumb to keep in mind is that, in general, people should aim to eat really well and healthy 75-90% of the time. That way, when we indulge in habits that may not be considered as healthy the body has the nutrients to better deal with it. Eating a steak with a side of broccoli which will counteract the negative effects of the meat much more effectively than eating a steak with French fries.

## Choose Complimentary Condiments

#### 10. Aim for *au natural* condiments

Instead of using marinades that are loaded with corn syrup, sugar and preservatives focus on seasoning your food with simple good-quality ingredients that are all health-promoting in their own right – i.e. olive oils, sea salts, fresh herbs and spices. Most conventional ketchups and BBQ sauces are laden with corn syrup and preservatives. If you do decide to use them, look for options on the market with natural sweeteners such as agave nectar. Look for mustard seasoned with ingredients like apple cider vinegar and tumeric.

#### 11. Go against the conventional grain

Use better quality breads for your burgers. In particular, those made from sprouted grains are best.

## Eat Gleefully

#### 12. Enjoy good company

Food is one main aspect of nutrition, but being with friends and family and having a great time at a BBQ also contributes to overall good health.

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