USDA Lowers Pork Cooking Temperature

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This isn't abuela's pork anymore. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has released new guidelines for cooking pork—and they may surprise you. According to the USDA, pork should be cooked to 145 degrees Fahrenheit, 15 degrees lower than was previously recommended.

"Our consumer research has consistently shown that Americans have a tendency to overcook common cuts of pork, resulting in a less-than-optimal eating experience," said Traci Rodemeyer, director of pork information for the National Pork Board. "The new guidelines will help consumers enjoy pork as its most flavorful, juicy—and safe—temperature."

The new guidelines apply to pork whole muscle cuts, cuts like loin, chops and roasts. Dishes should reach up to 145 degrees (and will still be a pink color), as measured with a digital food thermometer, and meat should be allowed to rest for three minutes before serving. Ground pork should be cooked to 160 degrees.

The drop in temperature is a direct result of advances in food safety and nutritional content in pork. Currently, the most common cuts of pork are 16 percent leaner than they were 20 years ago, and saturated fat has dropped 27 percent. Pork is, in fact, now as lean as the leanest chicken, a skinless chicken breast.

"As America's pork producers improved feeding and breeding practices to deliver leaner pork, in tandem with industry-wide efforts covering food safety, it was time to revisit the long-standing consumer guidelines for preparations," Rodemeyer said.

One thing that hasn't changed? These safety guidelines:

- Make sure to clean, washing your hands and kitchen surfaces often
- Separate, don't cross-contaminate
- Cook to proper temperatures
- Chill, refrigerate promptly

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