

**Extension Article – for December 28, 2020**  
**Nebraska Extension – Buffalo County**  
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**Doneness Versus Safety**

Is “done” the same as “safe”? How does a cook know? Webster’s dictionary defines "doneness" as the condition of being cooked to the desired degree. "Doneness" reflects subjective qualities such as the appearance, texture, and optimum flavor of a food. Food safety experts agree that foods are “safe” when they are heated for a long enough time and at a high enough temperature to kill the harmful bacteria that cause foodborne illness.

Recent research has shown that appearance, texture, and color are not reliable indicators of safety or doneness. Studies have shown that using a food thermometer is the only way to tell if harmful bacteria have been destroyed.

The Food Safety and Inspection Service reports that even if hamburgers look fully cooked, one in four hamburgers may not be safely cooked. Yet most home cooks do not use a food thermometer.

Food safety experts encourage cooks to get and use a dial or digital food thermometer. By using a food thermometer to check if fish, seafood, meat, poultry, and egg dishes are done, overcooking and guesswork can be eliminated. Food cooked to a safe internal temperature is juicy and flavorful. A food thermometer can be purchased in many grocery, hardware, or kitchen stores.

Here are some tips for using a food thermometer:

- Insert the food thermometer into the thickest part of the food, making sure it does not touch bone, fat, or gristle.

- Cook food until the thermometer shows an internal temperature of 160 °F for ground meats (hamburger) and egg dishes; 145 °F for fish and seafood, beef, pork, veal, and lamb steaks, chops, and roasts; and 165 °F for *all* poultry, casseroles, and leftovers.
- Clean the food thermometer with hot, soapy water before and after each use.

For personal preference food may be cooked to *higher* temperatures.

Using an accurate food thermometer takes the guesswork out of cooking. No more cutting into the turkey or beef roast to see if it looks done. Simply place the food thermometer into the food and it will indicate the temperature the food has reached. Cooks will know if the food needs to cook a few minutes more or if it is finished. This is especially helpful with combination dishes such as lasagna or egg casseroles that may brown on the top before they heat through.

By using a food thermometer on a regular basis, cooks can be assured that the food they cook is "done" as well as "safe".

For more food safety information contact Nebraska Extension in Buffalo County, 1400 East 34<sup>th</sup> Street, Kearney, NE 68847, or call (308) 236-1235.