[IMAGE]

Playing With Fire

By Editorial Staff

Barbecue grilling can be a great low-calorie, low-fat way to cook meals. Unfortunately, that spectacular barbecue taste can be toxic, increasing the risk of several cancers, including colorectal, breast and prostate cancer. The process of cooking over high flames can turn the natural chemicals in meat into cancer-causing substances known as heterocyclic amines (HCAs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). Researchers believe these chemicals lead to the growth of abnormal cells, which can turn into cancer cells.

Fortunately, you don't have to give up barbecuing altogether. Follow these simple tips to continue enjoying that smoky flavor:

1. **Marinate meat before grilling.** Marinades and seasonings like rosemary, garlic and sage may help block HCA and PAH formation in meat and fish by up to 99 percent.
2. **Lower the heat.** High heat (above 300 degrees) creates a breeding ground for carcinogens. Instead, let the coals cool to embers before cooking, move foods farther from the flames, or place foods in an aluminum pan to create a barrier between the flame and the meat.
3. An open outdoor grill with roaring flames. - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark **Cook smaller portions.** Smaller cuts of meat take less time to cook than large slabs. Flipping the meat frequently also cuts down on HCAs.
4. **Don't under- or overcook.** To avoid overcooking or undercooking (which can result in HCAs, PAHs and *E. coli*), be sure to grill meats to an internal temperature of 160 degrees.
5. **Precook meats.** Microwave meats for a couple of minutes to draw out the liquid. This reduces flare-ups over the grill and can reduce HCAs by 90 percent.
6. **Load up on antioxidants.** By combining grilled meats with fruits and vegetables high in antioxidants, such as apples, berries, broccoli and onions, you can activate enzymes in the body that reduce the effects of HCAs.

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