

Up, Up and Stay Food Safe
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Winter weather brings snow to the Sierras and many families take advantage of the opportunity for a fun filled vacation. Everyone remembers to pack warm clothes, sports equipment and water-proof boots, but who remembers to pack the food thermometer?

Those living or vacationing above 3,000 feet must remember that when cooking this far above sea level, food takes longer to reach a safe internal temperature. The elevation results in less oxygen and a lower atmospheric pressure. This means that water will boil at a lower temperature and that the moisture content of the air is lower than that at sea level. Because the boiling point is lower, foods that are cooked by boiling or simmering in liquid will take longer to cook thoroughly.

Special care must be taken with meat and poultry. These foods tend to dry out quickly, so the method of preparation should be considered carefully. The USDA recommends braising meats cooked at high elevations to retain moisture. First, brown the meat in fat or oil. Then, add a small amount of liquid and cover tightly before slow cooking at a low temperature. This will help the meat remain moist and tender. Remember to cook the meat longer. According to the USDA, "In general, if you are cooking meat at 325 °F, you should add one-fourth more cooking time. In other words, if you would normally cook a roast for 2 hours at 325 °F, you would need to cook it for a total of 2½ hours at high altitudes."

Now, use that food thermometer and test the internal temperature of the meat or poultry by inserting the thermometer at the thickest part of the cut. Be sure that the thermometer is not touching bone, gristle or fat, and that it is in the center of the meat. Check that the internal temperature has reached a safe level, but avoid overcooking. Remember that the moisture level of the air will be lower at the higher elevation and the meat will dry out more quickly. Use this chart to ensure that meats have reached the proper, safe temperature.

MEAT	
Fresh ground meats Beef, pork, lamb, and veal	160 °F
Beef, pork, lamb, veal (roasts, steaks, chops)	145 °F and allow to rest for at least 3 minutes*
Ham, fresh or cook before eating	145 °F
Ham, reheat fully cooked	140 °F
POULTRY	
Ground chicken, turkey	165 °F
Whole chicken, turkey	165 °F
Poultry pieces	165 °F

For questions about safe home food preservation, or to schedule a speaker for organizations or clubs on the topics of food safety or food preservation, call the Master Food Preservers at (530) 621-5506. For more information, be sure to go to the Master Food Preserver website at http://cecentralsierra.ucanr.org/Master_Food_Preservers/. Sign up to receive our new Master Food Preservers E-Newsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpnews/>.