

A top-down view of a white ceramic plate filled with several skewers of grilled vegetables. The vegetables include red and yellow bell peppers, zucchini, eggplant, and mushrooms, all charred and garnished with fresh green herbs. The skewers are arranged in a circular pattern on the plate.

Healthy Backyard BBQ Guide

TOP TIPS FOR
CLEAN COOKOUTS



jen mannarelli, llc

A HEALTHY BBQ

Why it Matters

Summer is in the air, which means hello pool days, beach trips, and yes - backyard BBQs. And while cookouts are fun, most BBQ fare is far from healthy. So before you fire up that grill, read on. This guide offers top tips for creating BBQ meals that are clean, safe, and delicious.

Toxins & Grilling: What's the Link?

If you're a grilling fan, you know it adds a delicious smoky flavor to food. But it carries some risks too. When meat is exposed to high temperatures, it creates carcinogens - toxins that increase the risk of cancer. The box below breaks down the top offenders.

But no need to toss your grill! The tips in this guide will help you dial down these toxins so you can grill safe all summer long.



Common Toxins From Grilling

- **PAHs:** Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are chemicals that form when fat or meat juices drip into a fire. The smoke rises, and these PAHs spread onto your food. PAHs can increase the risk of several forms of cancer.
- **HCAs:** When meat, poultry, or fish is cooked at high temperatures, chemicals called heterocyclic amines (HCAs) are formed. These chemicals are carcinogenic (cause cancer). Any burnt or charred pieces are full of HCAs.
- **Heavy metals:** Some charcoal products are made from wood with traces of heavy metals like lead and mercury. When burned, these toxins are released into the air. Grilling food in tin foil can leach heavy metals into your food, too. And heavy metals are bad news for your health. They can damage organs, weaken immune function, disrupt the nervous system, and increase the risk of cancer.

THE BEST INGREDIENTS

Top Picks

Between hot dogs, potato chips, and beer, classic BBQ food isn't exactly a picnic to digest. This can leave you feeling bloated, sluggish, and gassy. Luckily, putting together a healthy, delicious BBQ menu is easier than you think. It all comes down to choosing clean, whole-food ingredients and a few simple swaps.



Meat

- Choose grass-fed beef, pasture-raised poultry, and wild fish when possible. They taste better and are more nutritious. Win-win!
- Most processed meats, like hot dogs or sausage, are preserved with nitrates. Nitrates can create inflammation, so it's best to avoid them. Or opt for a nitrate-free brand like [Applegate Farms](#).



Marinades & Sauces

- Most store-bought marinades are packed with sodium, fat, sugar, and harmful additives. When possible, make a [DIY version](#) or choose clean brands like [Primal Kitchen](#).
- Antioxidants protect your body from harmful compounds like HCAs and PAHs, so sneak in antioxidant-rich ingredients as much as possible. Lemon juice, orange juice, vinegar, tomato sauce, herbs, spices, and olive oil are all great options.



Sides & Condiments

- To support digestion, add mineral rich foods like avocado, olives, sauerkraut, & pickles to your plate.
- Swap mayo for vinegar, mustard, or Greek yogurt in heavy sides like potato salad or coleslaw.
- Choose [clean ketchup](#) brands with no sugar added.
- Salads make amazing, nutrient-dense sides. Try this [quinoa tabbouleh](#), [cowboy caviar](#), or [cucumber tomato salad](#).



REDUCING TOXINS

From Grilling

Before you get grilling, here are some helpful ways to trim toxins and grill smart:

1. **Turn down the heat.** Charring and smoke exposure both create toxins. To keep this at bay, use lower cooking temperatures or cook with indirect heat.
2. **Pre-cook meat.** Longer grill times mean more toxins. Precooking meat in the oven, stove, or microwave can help shorten the grill time.
3. **Choose safer surfaces.** Ditch aluminum foil and nonstick cookware for cast iron or stainless steel.
4. **Use grilling tools.** The less contact meat has with an open flame, the better. Cedar planks, grill mats, and skewers are all handy ways to prevent direct contact.
5. **Flip it good.** Flipping food frequently allows food to cook more evenly and limits charring and HCA formation.
6. **Trim the fat.** Trim excess fat off of meat before grilling to keep smoke production down and reduce PAHs. Or choose leaner cuts of meat, so less fat drips.
7. **Cut off charred pieces.** Sometimes, charring happens. When it does, simply cut off any charred pieces of meat.
8. **Marinate meats.** Marinating meat, even for as little as 30 minutes, can drastically reduce HCA formation. Choose a mixture of lemon juice, vinegar, or wine with herbs, spices, and avocado oil.

COOKING OILS & SEASONINGS

Top Tips



Tip #1: Avoid seed oils

Seed oils like corn, soybean, and canola are extracted from seeds and plants, and most are highly processed. Seed oils are high in omega-6 fatty acids. While we need *some* omega-6s, most people consume far too much. And when your omega-3/omega-6 ratio gets imbalanced, it can cause chronic inflammation. That's why it's best to limit seed oils and stick to healthier options.



Tip #2: Choose grill-safe oils

The best oils for grilling have a high smoke point - meaning, they can withstand hot temperatures without breaking down and forming free radicals. Here are a few clean options, along with their smoke points:

- **Olive oil:** 390-470° F
- **Avocado oil:** 480-520° F
- **Beef tallow:** 400° F
- **Ghee:** 485° F

NOTE: Olive oil refers to *pure* olive oil, not extra virgin, which has a low smoke point.



Tip #3: Use smart seasonings

Many store-bought seasonings are made with artificial additives. Luckily, it's easy to throw together a healthy DIY rub. Think mineral-rich seasonings like sea salt, garlic, ginger, turmeric, cumin, oregano, thyme, rosemary, or sage. Prefer some heat? Add some chili powder, smoked paprika, or cayenne pepper. All contain capsaicin, which has anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties. Want some sweetness in your rub? Add 1-3 tablespoons of coconut sugar.

HEALTHY BBQ TIPS

For Gut Health & Detox

Add cruciferous veggies

Including cruciferous veggies to the menu is an easy way to help your body detox from grilling. Think broccoli, kale, cauliflower, cabbage, or Brussels sprouts. All are rich in sulfur compounds called glucosinolates that help your liver eliminate toxins. Need ideas? Whip up a kale salad or serve a tray of roasted Brussels sprouts or some cilantro lime cauliflower rice.



Garnish with fresh herbs

Fresh herbs make your dishes look pretty *and* protect your body. Rosemary, thyme, sage, basil, parsley, cilantro, and dill are rich in antioxidants, which neutralize free radicals. This can help protect your body from oxidative damage from grilling toxins.



Pair meals with vitamin C

When planning your BBQ, be sure to invite vitamin C-rich foods to the party. Vitamin C is a potent antioxidant that can help offset exposure to grilling byproducts. Vitamin C-rich foods include citrus fruits, bell peppers, tomatoes, pineapple, broccoli, and strawberries. *Tip:* pineapple, peppers, and cherry tomatoes are perfect for skewers!





HEALTHY BBQ

Checklist

Here's a quick recap on what we've covered in this guide:

- ✓ **Choose quality meats.** When possible, go with grass-fed meat, pasture-raised poultry, and wild fish. They deliver more flavor *and* nutrients.
- ✓ **Grill smart.** Cut back on grill-related toxins by keeping the heat low, precooking meat, trimming off excess fat, and choosing lean meats. Be sure to trim off any charred pieces too.
- ✓ **Make clean DIY marinades.** Marinating meat reduces grilling toxins and makes your food taste better. Skip store-bought marinades and whip up your own clean versions. A mix of lemon juice, vinegar, olive oil, herbs, and spices is all it takes. There are a few recipes on the next page!
- ✓ **Be choosy with cooking oils.** Pass on seed oils and opt for high-quality cooking oils with high smoke points. Olive oil, avocado oil, ghee, and beef tallow are all great picks.
- ✓ **Add in antioxidants.** Antioxidants can help combat oxidative damage from grill toxins. So sneak in antioxidant-rich foods to your BBQ meals like citrus, peppers, fresh herbs, and spices.
- ✓ **Freshen up sides.** Classic BBQ sides can be heavy and hard to digest. Do your belly a favor and include fresh options like salads, grilled fruit, veggie kebabs, or fermented vegetables like pickles or sauerkraut.

DIY MARINADE RECIPES

Clean & Fresh

Healthy Steak Marinade

Recipe marinates about 2 lbs of steak

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup coconut aminos
- 2 tbsp olive or avocado oil
- 1 clove minced garlic (or 1 tsp garlic powder)
- 1 tsp onion powder
- 3 tsp Italian seasoning (or 1 tsp each of basil, oregano & parsley)
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 1 tsp sea salt

Lemon Garlic Marinade

*Ideal for chicken or fish
Recipe marinates about 2 lbs*

Ingredients:

- 2 tbsp olive or avocado oil
- Juice and zest of one lemon
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tbsp fresh herbs (rosemary, sage, thyme, parsley, dill, etc.)
- 1 tsp sea salt
- 1/2 tsp black pepper

