

The Best Way to Cook Bacon

These techniques have been passed from baconsmith to baconsmith over millennia. I share them here as a public service.

Executive Summary

- Use thin-sliced, un-cured bacon
- Bake on a heavy sheet pan in a high-heat oven for 10-20 minutes
- Remove from rendered fat as soon as possible to prevent greasiness and chewiness
- Using parchment paper makes clean up easy

Step-By-Step Guide

1. Pre-heat the oven to 450 degrees. Different ovens behave differently (hot spots, poor air circulation, etc.) so experiment with this temp. Set the oven rack on the middle level.
2. Spread a large sheet of parchment paper on a heavy baking sheet. Pro Tip: Using a sheet that covers the entire pan will make cleanup easy. Don't bother with layers of foil or parchment paper - the fat always finds its way underneath if the pan isn't covered end-to-end without gaps.



3. Lay out the bacon on the sheet. Try to keep the pieces from touching each other. If they touch they will stick together. It could also cause arguments.



4. Once the oven is pre-heated, place the bacon on the center rack and set a kitchen timer for 10 minutes. Timing will vary depending on the style of bacon and the properties of your oven, so when in doubt, check frequently.
5. At around 10 minutes, when the bacon starts to crisp, rotate the pan 180 degrees in the oven. Pro Tip: Gently tilt the pan back and forth so the rendered fat is distributed across the pan. This pleases the bacon and helps it cook more evenly. If your oven heats unevenly or you're using a thin baking sheet, moving the fat around will help. There's no need to flip the bacon if the hot fat is well distributed.



6. Set another timer for 5-10 minutes. In a very hot oven, bacon goes from almost done to done in about 30 seconds, so check it regularly. In my oven, the bacon is almost always perfect after seven more minutes.
7. Place 2-3 layers of paper towels on a dinner plate.
8. The bacon is ready when parts of it (usually the ends) start to look just slightly over-done. Experienced noses will notice a very slightly burnt smell. A small amount of char is fine, but once you notice any burnt scent the bacon needs to come out of the oven ASAP. Some people may prefer bacon that is less cooked than this. Whatever.



Foamy fat is good. It means the fat is cooking the bacon at the right temperature. This is a key point. You are not cooking the bacon, you are rendering the fat and heating it up so the fat cooks the bacon.



Remove the bacon from the oven. Pro Tip: Place the pan on your stove directly under the vent and run the vent on high (if you have one that actually blows outside). If you don't vent this, your house will smell like bacon for the next eight hours. This may not be a problem.

Immediately transfer the bacon from the pan to the paper towels on the plate. Leaving the bacon in the grease as it cools will cause it to be chewy, greasy, and tough. Once the bacon is on the plate, use a paper towel to dab up the excess fat from the top. Pro Tip: Praise the bacon and complement its appearance. Bacon is vain and will taste better with its ego assuaged.



As the bacon cools, locate the best piece and eat it before anyone else notices. This is your right as baconsmith.

Bacon will remain edible and delicious while sitting on the counter for a really long time. Bacon scientists have attempted to measure the shelf-stability of fresh bacon, but it's usually all eaten within a few hours, so there's really no data.

Pro Tip: Put the pan outside to cool and use a rock to weigh down the parchment paper. This will help keep the smell out of your house and will let your neighbors know that you have bacon and they don't. Once the fat hardens, you can easily fold up the parchment paper and throw it away, and the pan only requires a rinse.



Key Take-aways:

1. Crisp bacon is correct and proper. Under-cooked bacon is gross. This has been confirmed by scientists who prefer crisp bacon.
2. A thick sheet pan will more evenly distribute heat, helping for more even cooking.
3. You're not baking the bacon, you're heating the fat which cooks the bacon.
4. Once the bacon is out of the heat, get it out of the grease as fast as possible.
5. Cooking bacon too slowly (on too low a heat) will cause it to be more chewy, tough, and greasy
6. Cooking it too fast will cause it to cook unevenly and to go from perfect to burnt in seconds.

FAQ:

Who should use this guide?

1. Anyone who enjoys crisp, delicious bacon
2. Lapsed and meat-curious vegetarians

Who should avoid this guide?

1. That person who doesn't like bacon
2. Members of the even-toed ungulate family Suidae

Why should you trust me?

1. I took the time to write this guide
2. My family says I make really good bacon
3. Like all men over 45, once per day I can roll 1d6 to access the Secret Trove of Middle-Age-Man Knowledge. Depending on the roll, I retrieve:
 - (6) Relevant, useful knowledge
 - (5) Technically accurate but irrelevant knowledge
 - (4) Confusing, socially-awkward anecdote
 - (1-3) Dad joke

Today, I rolled a 6

Why not thick-sliced bacon?

Thick-sliced bacon and cured bacon (often with sugars) require different techniques that I am not an expert in. You can often locate a thick-bacon expert in the woods, next to a campfire, with a properly-seasoned cast-iron pan.

How do I know if my bacon is under-cooked?

Pick up a slice of cooled bacon by the end and hold it flat and level. If it bends at all it is undercooked. Apologize and throw it in the compost bin.