

A Safer Way to Bring Home the Bacon



Meats like bacon, bologna, frankfurters, pepperoni, and salami have been cured to stop the growth of bacteria, delaying spoilage. Curing gives these meats their reddish pink hue and distinctive flavor. Scientists have discovered, however, that nitrites and nitrates, compounds used to cure meats, might be converted into dangerous cancer-causing substances called nitrosamines when cured meats are digested. Luckily, scientists also discovered that vitamin C can help to prevent formation of nitrosamines. So now, meat processors must by law include some form of vitamin C in cured meats.

To further ensure the safe consumption of cured meats:

- Don't let bacon or other lunch meats sit unrefrigerated for more than a few minutes. They can still spoil at room temperature.
- Cook bacon in a microwave oven. This produces lower levels of nitrosamines than pan frying or oven cooking.
- Always drain fat from cooked bacon, since drippings contain twice as many nitrosamines as the meat itself.

Despite these precautions, cured meats are still high in fat and sodium, so you should eat only limited amounts regardless of the threat of nitrosamines.