Is it done?

The stove-side doneness cheat sheet

Stop poking. Stop squinting. Stop guessing. Hang it by the stove.



MEAT: KNOW THE NUMBERS (INTERNAL TEMPERATURE)

Poultry
chicken, turkey

165°F

Thickest part, not touching bone. Pull breasts at 160°F and let them coast to 165°F while they rest.

Ground meat
beef, pork

160°F

Always. No exceptions. Ground meat is a different animal than whole cuts, literally.

Pork
whole cuts

145°F

Then rest 3 minutes. A little pink is fine and correct.

Beef
steaks & roasts

145°F

USDA recommended minimum, then rest 3 minutes. See the scale below for your preference.

STEAK, BY HOW YOU LIKE IT

Rare	Medium rare	Medium	Medium well	Well done
120–125°F	130–135°F	140–145°F	150–155°F	160+°F
very red center	warm red center	pink center	slightly pink	no pink, godspeed

Press test (a rough guide): poke the steak, then poke the meaty base of your thumb. Relaxed hand feels like rare; half-closed hand, medium rare; a full fist, well done. It takes practice, but it works.

Food-safety note: USDA recommends cooking whole cuts of beef, pork, lamb, and veal to 145°F with a 3-minute rest. Cooking steak to a lower temperature is a personal-risk choice.

EVERYTHING ELSE: LOOK, POKE, TASTE

Eggs
Scrambled: pull while still slightly wet; they finish off the heat.
Sunny side up: whites opaque, yolk still jiggles.
Boiled (from boiling water): soft 6–7 min, medium 9, hard 12. Then straight into ice water.
Baked: set at the edges, barely jiggly in the middle.

Pasta
Bite it. Tender, with a tiny bit of resistance in the very center is *al dente*. Soft all the way through is overdone. If it snaps, it needs more time.
Start tasting 2 minutes before the box says. Pull slightly early if it's going into hot sauce.

Vegetables
Roasted: fork-tender and golden at the edges. Pale means more time; color is flavor.
Sautéed: vivid, tender, still a little texture. Army green means overdone.
Steamed or boiled: a knife tip slides in, but it isn't mushy.

Bread
Tap the bottom. It should sound hollow.
Inside temperature: 190–210°F, depending on the type.

Muffins & cake
Toothpick test: it comes out clean, or with a couple of dry crumbs. Wet batter means more time.
Cake: edges pull away from the pan and the top springs back when pressed lightly.

Cookies
Pull them when they look **underdone.** Seriously. They keep cooking on the hot pan. The "done" moment is one minute before you think it is.

Soups & stews
Meat inside: follow the meat numbers above.
Vegetables: a fork goes in easily.
Braises: meat falls apart under a spoon. Here, overdone is the goal.

Sauces
Done when it **coats the back of a spoon** and a line drawn through it holds.
That's the *nappe* test, and you may now feel fancy.

The one tool that ends the guessing
An instant-read thermometer costs about $15–30 and takes the uncertainty out of meat, bread, and anything temperature-sensitive. Put the tip in the thickest part, away from bone.

Pull it a little early
Food keeps cooking after it leaves the heat. Chicken breast goes from done to dry fast, pasta keeps going in the sauce, and cookies finish on the pan.

When in doubt
Taste it.
This is always allowed.

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