

# A Safety Measure

## FOOD IRRADIATION



America has one of the safest food supplies in the world. Food irradiation is one more important tool for ensuring the safety of our food. Today, many supermarkets are offering irradiated ground beef as a choice to consumers.

### A Hot Topic, but a Cold Process

Irradiation is a food safety process like the process used to ensure the safety of milk, but does not use heat. During irradiation, food is briefly exposed to short bursts of energy, such as electron beams, to help control bacteria and other organisms like *E.coli* 0157:H7 that could cause foodborne illnesses.

### Is Food Irradiation SAFE?

YES. Over the past 40 years, national food authorities, including the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), have evaluated and determined that it is safe and effective. No other food technology has ever been as extensively studied and evaluated in respect to food safety — including canning, freezing and chemical additives. Food irradiation has been approved for wheat, flour, spices, and fresh fruits and vegetables in the United States. It was approved for pork in 1985, poultry in 1990



and beef in 1997. Also, most health and safety organizations endorse food irradiation.

### Now Available at Supermarkets, Restaurants and Schools

The only irradiated beef products currently available at supermarkets are fresh or frozen *ground beef* and fresh or frozen *ground beef patties*. Irradiated ground beef may be slightly darker red than non-irradiated ground beef. Also, you can expect the irradiated beef to cost approximately five to 20 cents more per pound. Mail-order/home-delivery outlets such as Omaha Steaks and Schwan's now offer irradiated ground beef. In addition, some restaurant chains such as Dairy Queen are using irradiated ground beef for their burgers, and several school districts nationwide have opted to serve irradiated ground beef.



### What's in a Symbol?

Check the label. The FDA requires that foods treated with food irradiation be labeled with the *Radura*, the international symbol for irradiation, and carry the statement "Treated by Irradiation."

## Safe Handling Instructions

This product was prepared from inspected and passed meat and/or poultry. Some food products may contain bacteria that could cause illness if the product is mishandled or cooked improperly. For your protection, follow these safe handling instructions.



Keep refrigerated or frozen.  
Thaw in refrigerator or microwave.



Keep raw meat and poultry separate from other foods.  
Wash working surfaces (including cutting boards),  
utensils, and hands after touching raw meat or poultry.



Cook thoroughly.

Keep hot foods hot. Refrigerate leftovers  
immediately or discard.

# It's as Easy as 1-2-3

Food irradiation does not replace proper food handling practices put in place by producers, processors, supermarkets — and you! Follow these easy steps to cook ground beef with care and confidence at home.

## 1. At the Supermarket:

Purchase ground beef (and all meats) last before checking out. Place meats in a cooler with ice packs to ensure that they stay cold if your trip home is 30 minutes or longer.

## 2. Store it Right:



Refrigerate ground beef immediately upon arriving at home. If you don't plan to use it within 2 days, then freeze it for up to 2 months. Defrost frozen beef in the refrigerator, never at room temperature.

## 3. Prepare it Safely:



- **Cook ground beef thoroughly to 160° F.** Use an instant-read thermometer inserted horizontally into the center of patties or meatloaves to check the temperature. If a thermometer is not available, make sure the center of the ground beef is not pink and juices show no pink color. When browning ground beef crumbles, cook until no pink remains. Never eat raw, rare or undercooked ground beef.

- **Don't cross-contaminate.** Wash hands well in hot soapy water before and after handling raw ground beef. Also wash any surfaces and utensils that have been in contact with raw ground beef.



## Tasty and Nutritious

Just like all beef, irradiated ground beef provides ZIP (zinc, iron and protein) as well as several B vitamins. The nutrient losses resulting from food irradiation are minor — less than or about the same as those caused by freezing. In addition, in comparison tests, consumers found no difference in flavor, juiciness or aroma in burgers with added natural antioxidants and irradiated at low doses when compared to non-irradiated burgers.

For additional information about food irradiation, visit these Web sites:

National Cattlemen's Beef Association, [www.beef.org](http://www.beef.org)

University of Minnesota, [www.health.state.mn.us/divs/dpc/food/irrfod/irrd.htm](http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/dpc/food/irrfod/irrd.htm)

Iowa State University, [www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsafety/rad/irradhome.html](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/foodsafety/rad/irradhome.html)

International Food Information Council, [www.ific.org](http://www.ific.org) (on its home page, search "irradiation")

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC, [www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/foodirradiation.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dbmd/diseaseinfo/foodirradiation.htm)



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