

High-Altitude Cooking Requires Adjustments

(NAPSA)—Instead of the typical kitchen query of “what’s cooking?” informed chefs often start by asking “where are you cooking?” with the more specific inquiry of “at what altitude?”

Top of the world

At elevations over 2,500 feet above sea level—most of the western United States is either wholly or partly at “high altitude”—the atmosphere becomes much drier. The air has less oxygen and atmospheric pressure, so cooking takes longer. In addition, at higher altitudes, water boils at a lower temperature, while leavening gases in breads and cakes expand more. To compensate for the lower boiling point of water at higher elevations, cooking times must be increased. Turning up the heat will not help cook food faster; the water will simply boil away faster and whatever you are cooking will dry out quicker.

Meat and poultry

Meat and poultry products are composed of muscle, connective tissue, fat and bone. The muscle is approximately 75 percent water, with leaner cuts having a higher water content. As a result, meat and poultry are susceptible to drying out while being cooked if special precautions are not taken. Cooking meat and poultry at high altitudes may require adjustments in both time and moisture. Depending on the density and size of the pieces, meats and poultry cooked by moist heat methods may take up to one-fourth more cooking time when



At higher elevations, water boils at lower temperatures and food takes longer to cook.

cooked at 5,000 feet. A food thermometer is the only way to measure whether food has reached a safe internal temperature. In a high-altitude environment, it is easy to overcook meat and poultry or scorch casseroles. To prevent overcooking meat and poultry (which will result in dry, unappetizing food) or to prevent undercooking (which can result in food-borne illness), check food with a food thermometer.

Eggs-act Cooking

It can take longer to cook eggs at high altitudes, especially those cooked in boiling water such as poached and hard-cooked eggs.

Many cooking methods can be used to cook eggs safely, including poaching, hard cooking, scrambling, frying and baking.

For more information, visit www.fsis.usda.gov or call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at (888) 674-6854 or ask a food safety question at AskKaren.gov.