

Use a Meat Thermometer

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In order to cook well, one needs either time or money. With enough time, even the simplest, most inexpensive cuts can be made delectable. More expensive cuts are easier to cook. Consider the differences between an oxtail and a beef tenderloin. The oxtail is less expensive, and riddled as it is with complicated muscle structure, it takes time to braise it to a state of tender perfection. The tenderloin is one smooth muscle, typically marbled with just enough fat to make it extra moist and tender; it's at its best simply grilled or pan-seared rare with a caramelized coating on the outside and a red-to pink center. If "better," more expensive cuts are overcooked, they become

Ground beef is another inexpensive cut that needs a certain amount of time and attention, but because it's ground, it's easier to cook than more complex cuts that require braising. There are also food safety issues with ground beef that do not occur with more expensive cuts like steaks and roasts. Any bacteria on beef is going to be on the outside. So with a steak or a roast simply searing the outside surface will render the meat perfectly safe, even if the inside is left quite rare. With ground beef, the entire package might be considered an "outside surface," because every part of the cut is ground up together. The U.S.D.A. recommends a fail-safe internal temperature of 140F for steaks and roasts, but 160F for ground meat.

At West Coast Cooking, we like to think of each cut as a culinary adventure. Consider carefully what the cut needs in order to render it as delectable as it can be. If it's a steak, be careful not to overcook it. If you prefer meat well-done, opt for a "lesser cut," one that benefits from slow-cooking or braising to render it tender. And remember, if you want beef done to perfection use a thermometer. It will keep you safe and help you prevent over-cooking those steaks.