



## CULINARY CONNECTION

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# SAY WHAT YOU MEAN PROPER COOKING TERMINOLOGY

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### IN ORDER FOR OUR RECIPES TO BE EXECUTED

**PROPERLY**, we need to know—and our staff needs to know—the meaning of the cooking terms that are found in recipes. Communicating with proper terminology and having our cooks understand and execute them, is often the difference between great food and food that is best thrown away. Have you ever had a piece of meat that seems like it's more of a sponge for grease? Chances are someone didn't follow the cooking method in the recipe.

While there is a myriad of cooking terms, just a few will get the job done in most operations. There are three categories for these terms: dry, moist, and combination. Knowing these and educating your staff will greatly benefit you and your operation. Your food will be prepared as you expected, which will lead to higher customer/patient/resident satisfaction and less food in the trash.

### DRY-HEAT METHODS

**Grilling** is the dry heat method that might come to mind first. In this method a minimal amount of fat is applied to either the grilling surface or the food being grilled, or both. The thing that sets this method apart from our next method is the heat source comes from beneath the food. Depending on the desired outcome, this method can be used for either cooking food from start to finish, or for marking (crosshatching/searing) food then finishing it later. Marking is usually done for banquet or bulk food settings, whereas cooking food completely is more suited to a la carte cooking.

**Broiling** is very similar to grilling, but with one exception. The heat source from broiling comes from above the food. A broiler used to be a very common piece of equipment in the kitchen, but they are no longer as



prevalent as they were a few decades ago. They have a “drawer” that pulls out, food is loaded, then the drawer is pushed back into the cabinet under the heat source. (Note: There are a few flat top griddles that also use this method or may have a “clamshell” that lowers over the griddle surface so that cooking can be done from the bottom and top simultaneously.)

**Sautéing** comes from the French word for jumping. This method is best for small to medium batches of food. A small amount of fat is placed in a heated pan on the stovetop. The food of choice is added and tossed (jumped) together with the oil. Sautéing is usually associated with a la carte cooking, and more specifically, a la minute cooking, so that food can be prepared order by order when it is needed. The advantage with this method is that food can be browned on all sides since it is almost constantly in motion. Also, the degree of doneness is very easy to control.

**Searing** is not necessarily a classical cooking term, but one that gets a lot of use. This method is widely used when food is not going to be cooked completely for service at that time. In behavioral health, since knives are not given to patients to use as a utensil, this method is very useful. A piece of protein can be seasoned and seared in advance. It is cooked at a high heat with a small amount of fat, just



**KNOWING THE THREE COOKING CATEGORIES—dry-heat, moist-heat, and combination methods—means your food will be prepared as expected, which leads to higher customer satisfaction and less food waste.**

long enough to color each side of the protein. The protein is then cooled and set aside for later. It can be brought up to temperature as is, or it can be topped with a sauce and cooked until tender. This can be done in a pan, on a griddle, or in a tilt skillet.

**Shallow frying** is most similar to sautéing but has its own characteristics. Like sauté, this is done most often on the stove top, but can also be done in a tilt skillet. This method works well for smaller foods like a chicken breast, pork cutlet, or sliced vegetables. Food is breaded using a standard breading station (flour -> egg wash -> flour/breading) then placed in the pan with the oil. The amount of oil in the pan is key to this method. The oil must reach just

above halfway up the food. Usually, the food is placed down on one side and then when it is sufficiently browned, it is turned once to finish cooking and browning on the other side. Temperature control is key here in making sure that the food browns correctly and cooks thoroughly.

**Deep-fat frying** is a dry-heat cooking method! Without going into too much detail as to why, fat is the medium and convection is at play to make this a dry-heat method. Here, food is completely submerged in fat. Most should be familiar with this method since the French fry is a favorite food in the United States. A deep-fat fryer is the most common piece of equipment for this, but a pot on the stove can be used or a tilt-skillet if large quantities are required.

**Baking/Roasting** is the most common dry-heat method. These terms can be used interchangeably, however there are some common associations that are made. For instance, there is a difference between the preparation of ‘baked potatoes’ and ‘roasted potatoes.’ In either case, food is prepared with either no fat, or minimal fat, and put in an oven.



## ARTICLE REFERENCES

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### MOIST-HEAT METHODS

**Steaming** stands alone in this category because the food should not be sitting in liquid. Rather, the steam should be circulating around the food. In most kitchens this is accomplished with a specific piece of equipment: a steamer or combi-oven. However, if this is not available, the combination of a 4-inch hotel pan with liquid, and a 2-inch perforated pan with a lid will make a good stovetop substitute. In both set ups, take care not to cram too much food into the perforated pans so that steam can circulate to all surfaces of the food.

The next three methods are similar but need to be chosen based on the time the food needs to be cooked or how a protein should be treated. In any of them, the food is completely submerged in the liquid.

**Poaching** is the lowest temperature of the moist-heat methods. The liquid should be between 160°-180°F. Instead of using a thermometer, I like to watch for bubbles to form on the bottom of the pot and then come up every few seconds. The most common foods to poach are seafood and eggs.

**Simmering** is the middle temperature setting in this category. The liquid should be between 185°- 205°F.

Without the use of a thermometer, the visual cues here are that bubbles are coming to the top of the pot steadily, however gently. This method is used widely for sauces and foods that need to be cooked for long periods of time.

**Boiling** is the last in the category and the hottest. The liquid should be at 212°F. Here we are looking for bubbles coming to the top of the pot steadily and almost violently. Pasta is a good example of a food that needs this method so the starch will break and be brought to the top, eliminating sticking with the addition of a little stirring.


### COMBINATION COOKING METHODS

**Braising** is a cooking method that entails both dry- and moist-heat methods. Here, food is either grill marked or seared, a liquid is added, then roasted in the oven or may be cooked in the tilt-skillet. Ensure enough liquid is added to account

for the length of cooking time. This method is best for, but not limited to, large cuts of meat. Pot roast is a great example of braising.

**Stewing** uses the same procedure as braising. However, the difference between the two is that stewing uses food that is cut into bite-sized pieces. The way I remember the difference between the two combination cooking methods is to think of “beef stew.” It is prepared by searing the meat then cooking it in liquid, but its defining characteristic is that the meat is cut small enough to eat in one bite.

### SUMMING IT UP

Using proper terminology in the kitchen will help you achieve the best possible end result when cooking. Becoming familiar with the methods presented here will go a long way towards producing well-prepared foods that will delight your customers. 

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1. Deep-fat frying is an example of which cooking method?
  - A. Dry-heat cooking
  - B. Moist-heat cooking
  - C. Combination cooking
2. Food that is cut into bite-sized pieces to be cooked for a longer period of time falls into which method?
  - A. Grilling
  - B. Braising
  - C. Stewing
3. When food is covered just over halfway in fat, it is an example of:
  - A. Deep-fat frying
  - B. Sautéing
  - C. Shallow frying
4. Food that is being prepared for a banquet, or to be served later, would be prepared using which method?
  - A. Boiling
  - B. Searing
  - C. Sautéing
5. Which moist-heat method is visually identified by bubbles that form on the bottom of the pot and rise every few seconds?
  - A. Poaching
  - B. Grilling
  - C. Boiling
6. Which method requires movement, or 'jumping' of the food?
  - A. Sautéing
  - B. Grilling
  - C. Boiling
7. Which dry-heat method is identified by the heat source coming from above?
  - A. Grilling
  - B. Broiling
  - C. Searing

