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Pan-Seared Steak

It takes a bit of skill to produce a fine stove-top steak.
E.M. Burton explains.

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All images: E.M. Burton

Early this March, Dr. Walter Willett, chair of nutrition at the Harvard School of Public Health, published a study that followed over 100,000 people for more than two decades (abstract: <http://archinte.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/abstract/archinternmed.2011.2287>).

As noted in the March 24 *L.A. Times* story "How rare should red meat be?" Dr. Willett found "the amount of red meat they ate was linked to a rise in premature death." He's talking about metabolic syndrome across the board. Willett notes, "We looked at total mortality. . . . We did see a linear, step-wise increase in risk of dying prematurely with higher red meat consumption. . . . It does appear that the data are quite strong."

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He added, however, "When you get down to maybe one serving of meat or less per week the risk gets pretty low."

As yet, there is no data being gathered to chart CrossFit athletes' meat consumption to test the impact of diet combined with 20-plus years of high-intensity functional movement. Until we have results of such a study, when cooking for my family I keep the red-meat consumption to the lower part of the protein list, after chicken and fish.

However, there are times when life calls for steak, and you should know how to pan-sear a steak to perfection on top of a stove.

Ingredients

Steak, about 1 inch thick (trim any fat away)

Salt and pepper

Canola oil

Supplies

Stovetop

Oven, warmed

12-inch skillet

Tin foil (if necessary)

Directions

1. Dry the steak with paper towels and sprinkle salt and pepper liberally over both cooking sides. Warm your oven to 150 F.
2. Heat the pan first to medium-high, then add oil. Getting the temperature right is critical; know it for your stove. It's the point at which the canola oil is slightly smoking. Wait until that temperature is reached to add the steak.
3. Place the steak in the pan and don't move it. Flip it at 3 minutes and, once again, don't move it. Reduce the heat to medium, and cook the other side for 4 to 5 minutes.
4. Move the steak to the warmed oven to let it rest for 10 minutes. You don't have to keep it in a warmed oven, but cover it with tin foil and let it rest before carving or serving.



Start with a grass-fed, boneless top sirloin steak for a good balance of cost and fat content.

Notes

One should balance the factors of cost and fat content when buying a steak. One of the best cuts in this category is a boneless top sirloin steak. I usually get more than I need for one meal in order to have some left over.

Lean steaks cook best at a high temperature. This is not for the faint of heart: high temperatures call for keeping your wits about you. These instructions are for medium-rare steak.

If you use a thicker cut, you'll require more cooking time. In my experience, a steak 1¼ inches thick should be seared 4 minutes per side, and a steak 1½ inches thick for 5 minutes per side (reducing the heat to medium at the 2-minute mark on the second side). If you're not sure, and as a rule of thumb, undercook the meat slightly, as the cooking process will continue after it's removed from the heat source, a phenomenon known as "carry-over cooking."

If you want to be specific about your degree of doneness—and test this method to figure out what works best for you—use a meat thermometer. Testing at exactly the moment you take the steak off the high heat, cook as follows: 115 to 120 degrees for rare, 120 to 125 F for medium rare, 130 to 135 F for medium, 140 to 145 F for medium-well, and 150 to 155 F for medium well done.

Practicing this technique and getting it right can be considered a basic life skill. Combine your meat with tossed vegetables and a good fat. You'll be glad you did.

