

barbecue your way

Yes, you can enjoy smoky, saucy, slow-cooked meats. Just keep our barbecue clues in mind.

BY Hope S. Warshaw, R.D., CDE
PHOTOS BY Blaine Moats



Backyard gatherings, summer festivals, and roadside diners all add up to barbecue—grilled, smoked, and straight from the pit. But sorting the rubs from the sauces and counting the carbohydrate, fat, and sodium can get spicy.

“Barbecue’s my business. But when I was diagnosed with type 2 in 2008, my doctor advised, ‘Change your lifestyle or you won’t be around to reap the rewards of your success,’” says Craig Haagenson, 44, owner of Haagenson’s Catering and Ribslayer to Go restaurant in McMinnville, Oregon. “I still savor barbecue, just less of it.” Craig has slimmed down 50 pounds and has his blood glucose under control on a couple of medicines.

Come along on our barbecue tour as Craig and health experts offer tips to fit barbecue into your meals.

Cooking style

“From a culinary standpoint, barbecue is diverse, using varied cuts of meat, rubs and sauces, and cooking techniques from smoking for days with flavored wood chips to quick grilling with charcoal or gas,” says Amy Myrdal Miller, R.D., of The Culinary Institute of America at Greystone in Napa Valley, California.

The variety can make barbecue overwhelming as you attempt to add the carbohydrate, fat, and sodium counts. The rubs and pastes applied to meats for flavor prior to cooking can be sweet, salty, or spicy. Word to the wise from Craig: If the sauce or cooked meat glistens or is caramelized (with a shiny,

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CARB-COUNT TIP:

Thick barbecue sauces often contain ketchup, which means added sugar and more carbs. Opt for thinner sauce, if possible.



golden-brown exterior), you can bet there's sugar within.

Meat of the matter

Red meat is the main attraction, of course. Traditionally, the meat is pork (ribs or pulled shoulder) or beef brisket. The fat content varies based on the cut of meat, how it's trimmed, and how much fat drips off during cooking. "The portion of meat can be a big problem, often being double or triple the 3–4 ounces of cooked meat likely on your plan," says Tami Ross, R.D., CDE, coauthor of *What Do I Eat Now? A Step-by-Step Guide to Eating Right with Type 2 Diabetes* (American Diabetes Association, 2010). Consider weighing servings of meat at home to learn how to eyeball sensible portions.

On the side

Sides are often an afterthought, dished up to fill out your plate.

CARB-COUNT TIP:

A shiny, caramelized surface indicates the meat was glazed with a sugary sauce while cooking.



You'll find coleslaw, from creamy to lighter vinegar-base recipes; baked beans, most often loaded with sweeteners; fat-heavy potato or macaroni salad; corn on the cob; and biscuits or rolls to sop up the sauce, restaurant owner Craig says.

Sides can cost you in the fat and carbohydrate columns, dietitian Ross says. If you limit corn, breads, mayonnaise-base salads, and baked beans, you're more likely to meet your nutrition goals, she says.

For a fusion-style side dish, Craig serves Thai slaw with cabbage, carrots, cilantro, and wonton-wrapper strips mixed with a secret vinegar-base dressing with ground dry-roasted peanuts. Dietitian Miller, PWD type 1, favors Bo's Barbecue in Lafayette, California. It's her indulgence twice a year, when she completes her plate with the restaurant's two nutritious sides—sweet potatoes and mixed baby greens.

How to enjoy barbecue

Saddle up with a few smart-eating strategies before you place your order.

Control portions

by sharing. Split one dinner between two people and order an extra healthful side or two. Hunt for an appetizer-size portion, a kid's meal, or a smaller entrée, such as pulled pork.

Choose flavorful, not heavily sauced, meat. Opt for a dry rub or sauce on the side to minimize sugar and salt.



Sauce sparingly or not at all. Given the choice, opt for a thin, vinegar-base sauce rather than a thick, sweet sauce.

Coast-to-coast flavors

The American barbecue scene serves up several styles. They're deeply rooted in regional history and geography; aficionados strongly defend their favorite barbecue flavors.



Save a few fat grams.

Choose leaner cuts of meat: pork shoulder or brisket instead of ribs. If chicken is available, order it and remove the skin before eating.



Enjoy healthful sides,

such as vinegar-base coleslaw, sweet potatoes, or greens. Limit breads, mayonnaise-base salads, and baked beans.

Fix barbecue at home

to control sugar and salt, says restaurant owner Craig Haagenson, PWD type 2. He's learned to use sugar substitutes and less salt in rubs and sauces since his diabetes diagnosis. He ups the flavor with allspice, cloves, and ground coriander seeds.

Meat math

Nutrition counts vary based on cut of meat, amount of fat trimmed before or after cooking, and the thickness and sweetness of sauces.

Meats (3 ounces meat, no bone)	Calories	Carbohydrate (grams)	Fat (grams)	Sodium (milligrams)
Pork ribs, with sauce	210	10	13	580
Pulled pork, with sauce	190	11	8	725
Beef brisket, no sauce	160	6	8	430

Source: calorieking.com

Saucy glossary

Knowing the types of rubs and sauces used to season barbecued meats helps you more precisely estimate the carbohydrate and sodium.

Barbecue sauces: Sauces can be sweet, smoky, or vinegary and range from thick to thin. Ingredients alter taste, consistency, and nutrient profiles. The amount of sugar and ketchup used affects the carb count.

Bastes (also called mops): Sauces applied to meats as they cook to keep them moist and create a flavorful crust. Oil, butter, and vinegar bases are common.

CARB-COUNT TIP:
Order sauce on the side so you can control how much to add to your meat.



Cures: Designed to draw out the moisture and build in a briny taste. Cures contain a lot of salt.

Glazes: Sugar-containing sauces basted on meats toward the end of cooking to provide a shiny coat.

Marinades: Combinations of tenderizing wet ingredients, such as olive oil, lemon juice, and vinegar, and flavorful dry ingredients, such as herbs, spices, garlic, and onion. Meat is soaked in the marinade for hours to flavor and tenderize. Much of the marinade is discarded, so it may contribute little fat or carbohydrate to your final count.

Rubs: Mixtures of spices, herbs, seasonings, and sweeteners rubbed on meats hours before cooking to enhance flavor and form a crust during cooking. Rubs can be powderlike or pastelike, depending on moisture in the ingredients. 



Hope Warshaw, R.D., CDE, loves Kansas City-style barbecued ribs—on occasion. She is the author of several diabetes books, including *Diabetes Meal Planning Made Easy*, fourth edition (American Diabetes Association, 2010).