

News Release

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Handling Venison Safely

Venison is a nutritious game meat that you can enjoy as roasts, steaks, and ground venison; or use as an ingredient in sausages.

"How you handle venison just after the kill affects the wholesomeness and quality of the final product," says Dennis Buege, University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension meat specialist. "Proper care begins as soon as you down the deer."

Key points when handling venison are: One--keep it clean, two--keep it dry, and three--keep it cold. These tasks aren't always easy to accomplish, but Buege offers these tried and tested tips to help assure safe and good tasting venison.

You do not need to further "bleed" a downed deer. Remove the viscera from the body cavity as soon as possible, especially if the deer was hit in the gut area. Be careful not to cut into the intestines, stomach or bladder.

If intestinal contents have spilled in the body cavity or the cavity is very bloody, use a clean cloth or toweling to clean up. Some recommend thoroughly rinsing out the cavity with cold water soon after the deer has been killed. However, it is very important that the cavity dries out quickly. Bacteria thrive in water, especially in warm weather. Spread apart the walls of the cavity with a clean stick to promote drying and cooling.

If you plan on saving the heart or liver, carry a clean, food-grade plastic bag with you. In most cases leave the hide on the deer to keep the meat surface clean and fresh.

With the added concerns of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), there are two important precautions to take when handling deer, according to Buege. First, do not eat any part of a deer that appears infected with CWD. Call the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) if you see a wild deer that appears emaciated or is behaving abnormally. Second, do not eat the eyes, brain, spinal cord, spleen, tonsils or lymph nodes on any deer.

Some advise consumers not to eat venison from deer taken within the CWD management zone in the southwestern part of Wisconsin. While there is less concern over the safety of venison from outside the management zone, many consumers are still uncertain. Public health officials note that while CWD has occurred in the U.S. for decades, both the World Health Organization and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have found no scientific evidence that CWD can infect humans. Despite these reassurances, no one can predict with absolute certainty that CWD will *never* cause human disease. Whether or not to consume venison is a decision that every hunter and his or her family will need to make.

Taking standard precautions will reduce or eliminate any contamination of deer meat by CWD prions from brain, spinal cord or lymph tissue. However, cooking or canning will not destroy prions that might be present, says Buege.

Whether you are field dressing a deer, or processing the carcass at home, there are several steps that you can take to minimize risk.

- Wear rubber or latex gloves.
- Do not process or eat venison from a deer that shows signs of CWD.
- Minimize contact with the brain, spinal cord, spleen and lymph nodes, and do not eat this tissue.
- Use separate knives for field dressing and removing the meat from the carcass. Do not use household knives for field dressing. Clean all knives and equipment, and then disinfect with a 50/50 solution of household bleach and water. Wipe down countertops and let them dry; soak knives for one hour.
- Remove only the meat, do not cut through any bones, and remove all fat and connective tissue before eating or storing the meat. This saves on freezer space and makes it easier to use. Do not stew deer bones for soup stock.
- Package and store meat from each deer separately. Be sure to label each package.
- Do not cut through the spinal column except to remove the head. Use a knife or saw for that purpose only, and dispose of the blade.
- Dispose of the brain, spinal cord, eyes, spleen, tonsils, bones and head in a landfill or by other means available in your area. Contact the DNR about your local options.

To slow bacterial growth and improve meat quality, a deer carcass should chill to less than 50 degrees within six hours. You can improve cooling by propping open the body cavity, keeping the carcass in the shade and exposing it to air movement. Never transport a carcass on the warm hood of a car. If the carcass freezes within the first six hours in extremely cold weather, the meat may toughen. In such cases, you can slow chilling by putting the carcass in a garage or shed, or by wrapping something around it. If you have the deer processed at a meat plant, get there as soon as possible to place the carcass under controlled temperature conditions.

"Aging" refers to holding carcasses at 35-45 degrees to allow natural enzymes to tenderize the meat. Tenderizing won't occur if the carcass is frozen, and proceeds more quickly above 45 degrees. You must weigh the benefits of aging against the drying of exposed surfaces and possible bacterial spoilage. In warm weather, it's risky to age venison, and it is better to process it as soon as possible.

Don't use black garbage bags for storing venison trimmings destined for sausage making. These bags are often made from recycled plastics and are not intended, or approved, for food use. Instead, use clear or white food-grade plastic bags, or rigid plastic containers. Some meat plants provide proper storage bags.

Our UW-Extension office at 4319 Expo Drive (683-4168) has publications including: *So You Got a Deer* (G1598), *Wisconsin's Wild Game: Enjoying the Harvest* (B3595) and, *Canning Meat, Wild Game, Poultry and Fish Safely* (B3345). These publications can be purchased from our office or ordered from Cooperative Extension Publications by calling 877-947-7827; by Fax: 414-389-9130; or online at <http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/>.

For more information on CWD:

<http://www.datcp.state.wi.us/ah/agriculture/animals/disease/chronic/>

For more information on deer donation programs:

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/damage/donation>

For information on handling deer carcasses and venison:

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/issues/fmd/index.html>

SIDEBAR:

Nutrient Comparison of Venison, Beef and Pork

Per 3 ounce cooked, trimmed serving

	Venison*	Beef Loin	Pork Loin	Chicken Breast	Chicken Thigh
Calories	135	180	170	120	150
Protein (grams)	26	24	26	24	21
Total Fat (grams)	3	8	7	1.5	7
Saturated Fat (grams)	1	3	3	0.5	2
Cholesterol (mg)	95	65	70	70	80
Iron (mg)	4	2	1	1	1

Source: USDA Nutrient Database for Standard Reference

(<http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/>)

*USDA nutrient information does not specify a particular cut for venison.

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