Like all meat processing, the sausage-making process is strictly regulated and inspected by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Sausage-makers also employ comprehensive quality and safety programs so the meat that reaches the consumer's or restaurant's table is as wholesome as it is delicious.

NUTRITION INFORMATION

There are as many different nutrition profiles for sausage as there are sausages. For that reason, consumers should refer to sausage packages for detailed nutrition information. When sausages are purchased fresh from the deli counter, nutrition information typically is supplied upon request.

In recent years, many sausage companies have begun offering low-fat version of sausage which reduce fat content and calories by as much as 50 percent.

Poultry sausages, which typically have a lower fat and calorie content, also have become popular and are available with many unique seasonings, like basil and sun-dried tomatoes.

GLOSSARY OF SAUSAGES

Bockwurst—A veal and pork sausage with a taste and bite similar to that of frankfurters. Bockwurst is available fresh and cooked.

Bologna—A fully cooked, mildly seasoned sausage made from beef and/or pork. Bologna is the second-most popular sausage sold in America, just behind frankfurters.

Bratwurst or White Hots—Bratwurst is made from pork and veal in much the same way as frankfurters, although the sodium nitrite is omitted, giving bratwurst its white color. When precooked, bratwurst is often called a White Hot. Fresh bratwurst is typically a coarser style sausage made of pork.

Chorizo—A Spanish, dry sausage made from coarse-cut pork and highly spiced.

Frankfurter—A mildly seasoned, precooked sausage that may be made from beef, pork or poultry. Frankfurters, commonly known as "hot dogs," account for 25 percent of all sausages sold in the U.S.

Italian Salami—Italian Salami is typically made from coarse-chopped cured pork and fine-chopped lean beef and characterized by a unique, tangy flavor. Genoa, Milano and Sicilian salamis are regional specialties.

Italian Sausage—A fresh sausage usually made from pork and spiced with pepper, fennel and anise.

Kielbasa—The term "kielbasa" is often used interchangeably with "polish sausage." It is a coarse-ground beef and pork sausage that is smoked to a medium red color.

Knockwurst (or Knackwurst)—A coarse-ground beef, pork and veal sausage, seasoned with garlic or onion and smoked to a reddish brown.

Liverwurst—A fine-ground cooked sausage, made from pork and liver, seasoned with onions, spices and sometimes pistachios.

Pepperoni—A spicy, coarse-ground pork and beef sausage, seasoned with red pepper and typically used as a pizza topping.

Pork Sausage—a fresh, uncooked sausage made from pork and seasoned with salt, pepper and sage, typically sold in link, patty or chub form.

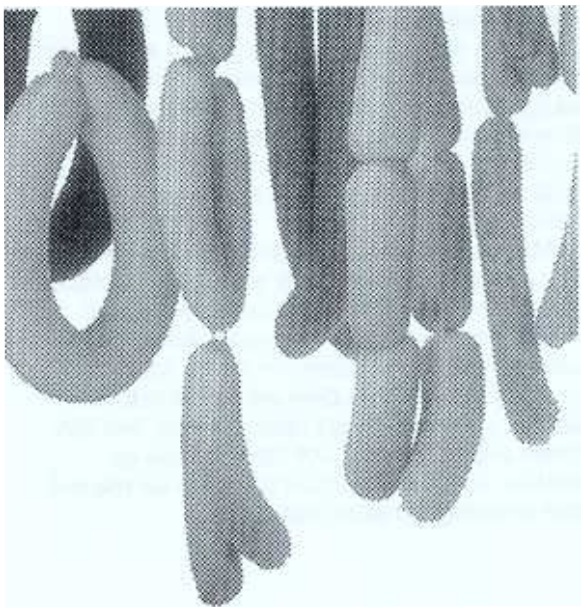
Thuringer—A cooked sausage made mostly from pork. Occasionally beef and veal are added. In many parts of the U.S., the term summer sausage is used interchangeably with thuringer.

For more information about sausage, contact the

NATIONAL hot dog & sausage COUNCIL

Box 3556, Washington, DC, 20007

THE MANY VARIETIES OF SAUSAGE



HISTORY

Sausages are among the oldest meat products recorded in history. The term sausage comes from the Latin word "salsus" meaning salt and refers to chopped or minced meat preserved by salting.

Sausages reportedly were used by the Babylonians and the Chinese about 1500 B.C. Homer's "Odyssey," written in the eighth century B.C., also refers to sausages. In those days, animal stomachs and intestines where filled with chopped meat and spices and typically were cylindrical in shape.

Sausages were mentioned in A.D. 228 by Athenaeus in the Deipnosophists, the oldest known cookbook.

Many varieties of sausages were being produced by the Middle Ages and each was unique depending on the climate of the region. The warmer climates of Italy, Southern France and Southern Spain where preservation was an issue prompted the development of dry sausages, like salami. The cooler climates in Germany, Austria and Denmark gave rise to fresh and cooked sausages like Bratwurst.

During this period, spices for sausage-making became increasingly valuable commodities. In fact, Columbus was trying to find a shorter route to the Spice Islands in the Far East when he landed in the area now known as Jamaica, which is also famous for its spices.

Over the years, sausage-making evolved into a valued trade with masters teaching apprentices, much like baking, blacksmithing or shoemaking. Many sausages have come to be named after the regions or towns where they were developed, like Genoa salami from Genoa, Italy; bologna, from Bologna, Italy; and frankfurters, from Frankfurt, Germany.

Although sausage-making has changed in many respects since Babylonian times, sausages have retained much of the flavor and style that made them popular. Many sausages continue to be prepared in natural casings, which are made from the cleaned intestines of sheep and hogs, although more and more of today's sausages use edible collagen casings because they offer greater uniformity in size. Still other sausages use cellulose casings, which are not edible and are removed after processing and before eating.

TYPES OF SAUSAGES

There are literally hundreds of different types of sausages, but they generally fall into the following four categories: fresh sausages, uncooked smoked sausages, cooked sausages, dry and semi-dry sausages.

Fresh Sausages—Fresh sausages are made from select cuts of fresh meat, must be stored in a refrigerator or freezer and must be thoroughly cooked before they are consumed. Examples of fresh sausages include: fresh pork sausage, fresh bratwurst, fresh chorizo, fresh thuringer and fresh kielbasa. Many of these sausages also may be purchased precooked.

Uncooked Smoked Sausages—These products are smoked, but not cooked prior to being sold. They include fresh smoked pork sausage and fresh smoked kielbasa. Like fresh sausages, uncooked smoked sausages must be kept refrigerated and may be held for no longer than seven days. They also must be cooked thoroughly before consuming. For cooking instructions, see "cooking sausages."

Cooked Sausages—Cooked sausages are cured during processing, fully cooked and smoked. They must be refrigerated until consumed. Many of these type of sausages are sold vacuum-packaged, and the freshness date on the packages should be checked and followed. Absent vacuum packaging, or once vacuum packaging is opened, cooked sausages will generally keep for seven days in the refrigerator. Examples of these products include frankfurters, bologna, beerwurst, mortadella, cotto salami and knockwurst.

Dry and semi-dry sausages—Are made from fresh meats that are cured during processing. These sausages may or may not be smoked. A specially controlled fermentation process that lowers the pH preserves dry and semi-dry sausages and gives them their characteristic tangy taste.

Dry sausages, like Italian pepperoni, for example, require longer drying times than semi- dry sausages and are generally not cooked. Dry sausages do not need to be refrigerated. Semi- dry sausages like summer sausage and Lebanon bologna are typically fermented and cooked in a smokehouse. These sausages need to be refrigerated.

COOKING SAUSAGES

When cooking link sausages, cook slowly to avoid splitting the casings. Turn sausages using a turner or tongs, not a fork which could puncture the casings and allow flavorful juices to escape.

Fresh sausage, which is not cooked during processing, has a rosy color and needs to be fully cooked before serving. Fresh sausage is best when parboiled, then pan-fried or grilled.

To pan-fry, place the sausages in a heavy skillet. Add water to cover sausage and parboil until sausage is grey throughout (approximately 10 to 15 minutes). Drain water and fry over medium heat until nicely browned.

To grill, parboil as indicated above. Then grill over medium heat, turning frequently until grey-brown throughout. Fresh sausage may be grilled without parboiling. In this case, it is important to cook the sausage slowly to ensure thorough cooking.

Cooked sausages need only be reheated by either steaming or baking.

To steam sausages, bring a pan of water to a boil. Remove from heat and add sausage. Cover the pan and let stand until the sausage is heated through, approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

Cooked sausages may also be reheated in a moderate oven along with other foods. They also may be microwaved, grilled or pan-fried.

THE SAUSAGE-MAKING PROCESS

Although sausage-making has been the subject of much speculation, there is nothing unusual or mysterious about the process. Cuts of meat and poultry are finely minced in gigantic choppers. Seasonings like allspice, pepper, cardamom, garlic, sage, nutmeg and coriander, along with salt are added to the mixture until it becomes almost like batter, which may be smooth or coarse depending on the type of sausage being made.

The mixture is then pumped into casings that may range from an inch to eight inches or more in diameter. The long strands of sausages are then linked together by hand or by machine into appropriate lengths. In the case of cooked and smoked sausages, the long strands are hung on racks and sent to ovens or smokehouses. In the case of fresh sausage, the links are packaged and refrigerated or frozen, and then sent out for sale.