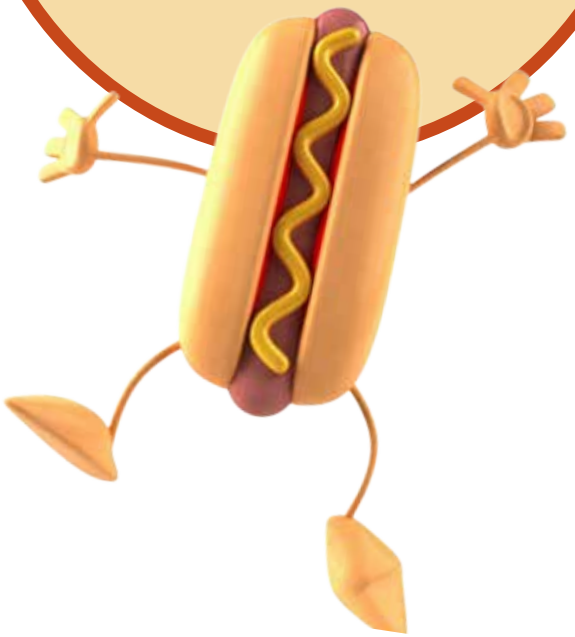
National HOT DOG & SAUSAGE Council
www.hot-dog.org

HOT DOG FACTS, FIGURES AND FOLKLORE

Hot Dogs.

They are a favorite American food – but so much more. They are the stuff of movies and music, of regional and city rivalries and of our very vocabulary. A “hot dog” can be a dare-devil or a show off. When paired with an exclamation point, “Hot Dog!” conveys joy and happiness.



Hot Dog History

Many stories exist about the creation of the hot dog, and its true origin is often debated. Hot dogs as we know them today trace their origin as far back as the 15th century to various parts of Germany or Austria, such as Frankfurt or Vienna. More current references to dachshund sausages and hot dogs are attributed to German immigrants in the 1800s.

Folklore suggests that hot dogs first became popular in the U.S. when a German immigrant began selling them from a cart in the Bowery district of New York City. In 1871, Charles Feltman opened the first Coney Island hot dog stand, and their popularity grew and spread south where the first sausage was served at a baseball park in 1893, creating the bond between hot dogs and baseball.

The name “hot dog” is often attributed to cartoonist who observed the carts selling “red hot dachshund dogs” on the New York Polo grounds and was unable to spell dachshund, so he printed “hot dogs” instead. However, this cartoon has not been found, prompting many historians to question the legend’s accuracy. The immigrant vendors of the time also brought their dachshund dogs, prompting their carts to be called dog wagons. Possessing good humor, these vendors were known to tease that their sausages were made from their dachshunds. Certainly, this was nothing more than a friendly joke, but this may be where the term “hot dog” was coined.

As for the bun, legend has it that was a happy accident. Sausages were previously consumed while wearing gloves. As the legend goes, a sausage seller at an exposition during the turn of the 20th century ran out of gloves and had to improvise by serving the sausages on rolls.

While the exact origin may not be known for certain, it’s clear the legends of the hot dog solidify its important place in American culture.

So What IS a Hot Dog – Technically Speaking?

Believe it or not, the government has an official definition, but like so many government documents, it's a little hard to understand, so we'll translate. Hot dogs are cooked and/or smoked sausages prepared from one or more kinds of muscle meat or poultry (like chunks of stew meat). Water or ice, or both, may be used to help mix and blend seasonings, like salt, pepper, garlic, coriander, mustard, and curing ingredients like sodium nitrite, that give hot dogs their characteristic color and flavor.

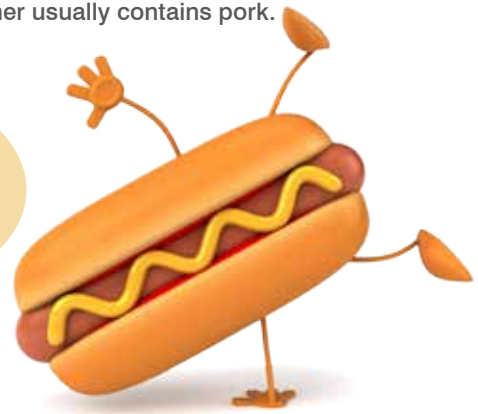
According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, hot dogs may contain no more than 30% fat or 10% water. A tiny fraction (up to 3.5%) can be a non-meat binder like non-fat dry milk, cereal or dried whole milk) or it can be 2% isolated soy protein. Whatever ingredients are used must appear in the ingredient statement.

The most important part of this long definition is meat or poultry. In fact, a hot dog without meat or poultry cannot be called a hot dog. (It's more of a tubular, hot-dog like product – a "wannabe" – but it's definitely not a hot dog.)

Most hot dogs are skinless, meaning their casings have been removed before packaging. A small percentage of hot dogs are in edible, natural casings that give them a "snap" when you eat them.

Franks and wieners were the original name for the americanized hot dogs and named for their hometowns, Frankfurt, Germany and Vienna, Austria. While hot dogs, franks and wieners are commonly used interchangeably today, a frank typically refers to an all-beef product, while a wiener usually contains pork.

Hot Dogs are included as a menu item at the Vatican and they have been served at the White House.



How Are They Made?

Hot dog making has been the subject of much humor, rumor and speculation. But the answer is less exciting than the question.

Meats used in hot dogs come from the muscle of the animal and looks much like what you buy in the grocer's case. If variety meats such as liver and hearts are used in processed meats, the U.S. Department of Agriculture requires the manufacturer to declare those ingredients on the package with the statement "with variety meats" or "with meat by-products." The manufacturer must then specify which variety meat is included. In the U.S., companies are required to list ingredients in order, from the main ingredient, to the least ingredient. As a culture, we don't choose to consume variety meats and byproducts, very often, so hot dog makers don't tend to add them.

The manufacturing process goes something like this:

1. Small cuts of beef, pork or poultry are cut or ground into small pieces and placed in a giant mixer.
2. Stainless steel choppers blend the meat, spices, ice chips or water and curing ingredients into a batter that looks a little like a cake mix.
3. The mixture is then pumped into an automatic stuffer/linker machine, where it flows into casings.
4. Filled casings are pinched at regular intervals to link them into long strands of hot dogs and then moved to the smokehouse.
5. There they are fully cooked under controlled temperature and humidity conditions.
6. After passing through the smoke and cook cycle, the hot dogs are showered in cool water and the casings are stripped off. (When natural casings are used, they remain on product).
7. The individual links are then packed, sealed and shipped.

Hot Dog Consumption

Chicago Hot Dog

In 2012, consumers spent more than $1.7 billion on hot dogs in U.S. supermarkets alone. In baseball stadiums, hot dogs remain fans' favorite ballpark treat, and fans are expected to consume more than 20 million during the 2013 season.

If you want to see controversy, just ask a New Yorker his opinion of a Chicago Dog or vice versa. Just like people are loyal to the hometown baseball team, they are equally loyal to their hometown hot dog. New York and Chicago Dogs are among the most popular, but other locations, such as West Virginia and Seattle, have their own distinct varieties that are beloved by local citizens.

Chicago's signature hot dog developed out of some friendly rivalry when vendors began adding additional toppings to "one-up" the competition. At one time, the Chicago Dog was nicknamed a "Depression Sandwich" because it was so economical and so satisfying. Today, a Chicago Dog is considered an all-beef hot dog on a steamed poppy seed bun with raw onions, green (and we mean Chicago style BRIGHT green) relish, mustard, tomato slices, a pickle spear, sport peppers and a dash of celery salt.

Mickey Mouse's first on screen words were "Hot Dog!" marking his transition from the silent screen.

Regional Favorites Include:

Kansas City Dog
Get the mints out - you'll need them when you order up a hot dog in KC as it is served with sauerkraut and melted Swiss cheese on a sesame seed bun.

Sonoran Dog
This Southwestern favorite features a grilled, bacon-wrapped hot dog on a sturdy bun, pinto beans, grilled onions and green peppers, chopped fresh tomatoes, relish, tomatillo jalapeno salsa, mayonnaise, mustard and shredded cheese.

Michigan Coney Island Dog (AKA Michigan Coney)
This favorite of Michiganders features a meaty chili sauce on top of a hot dog with mustard and onion.

West Virginia Dog

Just like the southern variety, this dog is topped with coleslaw but also features chili and mustard.

Southern Style Hot Dog

Head down south and you'll end up with your dog "dragged through the garden" and topped with coleslaw.

New York Style

From the Bronx to Battery Park to Coney Island, when you buy your hot dog in the Big Apple, it will come served with steamed onions and a pale, deli-style yellow mustard.

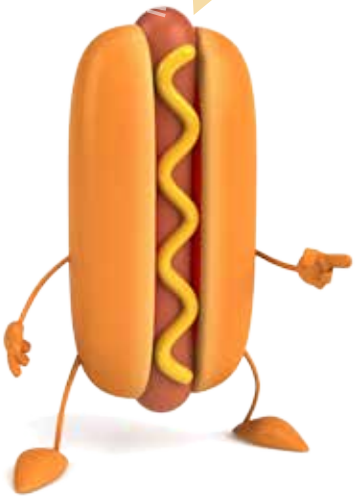
Nutritious, Safe and Inspected

Hot dogs are a satisfying and delicious food and a great source of protein. A regular hot dog (a 45 gram serving) contains 150 calories, 13 grams of fat, and 5 grams of protein. However, for consumers seeking to reduce fat and sodium, there are plenty of choices in the marketplace, including low-fat or fat-free dogs that contain as few as 45 calories.

Like all meat and poultry products, hot dogs are inspected carefully by USDA inspectors, who are in meat and poultry plants every day. These inspectors monitor food safety and check to ensure that proper labeling is applied.

According to a NHDSC poll, of all baseball players, Babe Ruth would win a hot dog eating contest.

Miller Park in Milwaukee is the only Major League Baseball ballpark that sells more sausages than hot dogs per season.



The average weight of a fully loaded baseball park hot dog vendor's bin is 40 lbs.

Hot Dog Etiquette

The National Hot Dog and Sausage Council includes a full guide for etiquette in an online video, but here are just a few tips and tricks to get you through National Hot Dog Month:

Don't...
Put hot dog toppings between the hot dog and the bun. Always "dress the dog," not the bun. Condiments should be applied in the following order: wet condiments like mustard and chili are applied first, followed by chunky condiments like relish, onions and sauer-kraut, followed by shredded cheese, followed by spices, like celery salt or pepper.

Do...
Eat hot dogs on buns with your hands. Utensils should not touch hot dogs on buns.

Don't...
Take more than five bites to finish a hot dog. For foot-long wiener, seven bites are acceptable.

Do...
Lick away condiments remaining on the fingers after eating a hot dog instead of washing.

Don't...
Use ketchup on your hot dog after the age of 18. Mustard, relish, onions, cheese and chili are acceptable.

Clint Eastwood as Dirty Harry told movie goers never put ketchup on a hot dog.

Closing Thoughts

Whether you choose to call them hot dogs, franks or wieners, and whether you like them Chicago Style, New York Style or even naked, hot dogs are a delicious and iconic food that Americans love. They've earned an enduring place in our cultural history.

Betty White eats a hot dog and chips for lunch every day on the set of Hot in Cleveland, and she says it's the secret to her longevity

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