

# How to Tenderize Meat: 4 Easy Methods

Tough cuts do not have to stay tough. Tenderizing either breaks down muscle fibers or gives salt and time a chance to help the meat hold on to moisture. Choose the method that fits the cut and how much time you have.

**PREP 5–15 MIN • WAIT NONE TO 24 HOURS, DEPENDING ON METHOD • BEST FOR TOUGH OR UNEVEN CUTS • LEVEL EASY**

## Before You Start

Match the method to the cut. Pounding and scoring suit thin, boneless cuts. Salting and marinating need time in the refrigerator. Hard-working cuts such as chuck roast, brisket and pork shoulder become tender with long, gentle cooking.

## What You Need

- Pound or score: meat mallet or rolling pin, parchment or plastic wrap, sharp knife
- Salt: kosher salt, a rack set over a rimmed tray
- Marinate: food-safe bag or covered dish; an acid (vinegar, citrus juice, yogurt or buttermilk) or an enzyme ingredient (pineapple, papaya, kiwi or fresh ginger); oil and seasonings
- Slice & slow-cook: sharp knife, cutting board, Dutch oven or slow cooker

## How to Do It

### Pound or Score



1. Place boneless meat between sheets of parchment or plastic wrap.
2. Working from the center out, pound gently with the flat side of a mallet or a rolling pin until the meat is an even thickness, about 1/2 inch for chicken breasts or pork chops.
3. For flank or skirt steak, score the surface with shallow cuts in a crosshatch about 1 inch apart.
4. Wash hands, tools and surfaces after handling raw meat.

## Salt



1. Pat the meat dry and sprinkle evenly with about 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt per pound.
2. Set it on a rack over a rimmed tray and refrigerate, uncovered, for at least 1 hour and up to 24 hours.
3. Cook as usual without adding more salt.

## Marinate



1. Mix the marinade, add the meat and turn to coat.
2. Cover and refrigerate.
3. Beef and pork: about 2–12 hours.
4. Chicken: about 30 minutes to 4 hours.
5. Fish and shrimp: 15–30 minutes.
6. Enzyme marinades with pineapple, papaya or kiwi: 30 minutes or less, because longer can make meat mushy.
7. Discard used marinade, or bring it to a boil before serving it as a sauce.

## Slice & Slow-Cook



1. For tough cuts such as chuck roast, brisket or pork shoulder, brown the meat, add liquid to come partway up the sides, cover and cook low and slow, about 2 1/2–4 hours at 300–325°F, until a fork slides in easily.
2. For any cooked meat, find the lines running through it and slice thinly across them, not along them.

# Tips

Acidic marinades add flavor quickly, but long soaks can turn the surface mushy rather than tender. Salting and slicing against the grain help most cuts. Cook meat to safe temperatures: 145°F with a 3-minute rest for whole cuts of beef and pork, 160°F for ground meat and 165°F for poultry.

### Jane’s Note

I don’t like anything to be dry and chewy. My go-to is often vinegar, and which one I use depends on the recipe. A splash in a simple marinade adds flavor and helps tenderize the meat.

# Storage

Keep meat in the refrigerator while it salts or marinates, and cook it within the times listed. Refrigerate cooked leftovers within 2 hours and use within 3–4 days.

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