

The Difference Between Ground Beef and Hamburger

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Ground beef and hamburger are names that are used interchangeably by many people. After all, hamburgers are one of the most popular foods in the U.S. Over the last 20 years, Americans have increased their yearly hamburger consumption from 22 pounds to 30 pounds per year. On average, a family of four consumed 120 pounds of hamburger last year. Depending on your supermarket, you may be able to obtain hamburger, ground beef, ground chuck, ground round or ground sirloin. In general, the price per pound is a reflection of the amount of fat in these products. As the amount of fat in the product decreases, the price increases.

According to government regulations, hamburger and ground beef can be made using fresh or frozen beef. Both products cannot contain more than 30 percent fat. The method of adding beef fat to hamburger is the primary difference between ground beef and hamburger. Ground beef can only be made using the fat that is a component of meat trimmings. If a processor makes ground beef containing 30 percent fat, the processor must use meat trim that contains about 30 percent fat. However, if the processor wanted to make hamburger containing 30 percent fat and only had beef trim containing about 20 percent fat available, pieces of beef fat could be added to the meat until the hamburger contained 30 percent fat.

Traditionally, the lean-to-fat ratio has been listed on the label of ground beef and hamburger. For example, ground beef commonly has been identified as "70 percent lean/30 percent fat" or "80 percent lean/20 percent fat". With the advent of the nutrition labeling guidelines, retailers have changed how ground beef and hamburger are labeled. You may now find a package labeled as "80 percent fat free" with the understanding that the product contains 20 percent fat. The U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration are currently trying to resolve how the percent fat and percent lean meat in ground beef and hamburger should be identified on the product label.

If a package of ground beef does not give an indication of the amount of fat in the product, it may identify the primal cut of meat where the trimmings originated. A package label may list the meat as ground round, indicating that the meat is from the round. Typically, ground round is leaner than ground sirloin, while ground chuck is fatter than ground round or ground sirloin. Since ground sirloin comes from the loin-sirloin area of a beef carcass, it is usually more expensive than ground chuck or ground round.

With the selections available at supermarkets and grocery stores, consumers can select the type ground beef or hamburger that fits their budget and recipes.