LAND OF CONFUSION: THE FAQs OF STEAK

ALL THE FOLLOWING APPLY TO MEATS IN GENERAL, NOT JUST STEAK

HOW SHOULD YOU THAW YOUR STEAK?

If you're anything like me, you often realize your main course is frozen when you're already starving. There's no need to let your steak sit in the fridge for eight hours to thaw. Just ask iconic food scientist Harold McGee, who described the smart way to thaw in his piece "A Hot-Water Bath for Thawing Meats." I've bolded the most actionable points, and 45–60 minutes will take care of a rib eye:

"I fill a **large pot** [or a mixing bowl] **with 125°F [52°C] water from the tap, immerse the plastic-wrapped meat, weigh it down with a slotted spoon to keep it underwater, and stir the water occasionally.** The water temperature drops, but stays above 100°F [38°C] for a half-hour or so, depending on how much food is thawing.

"Last week, I thawed 2"-thick filets mignons in an hour, whole squab in 40 minutes, a 1-lb whole fish in 20 minutes, and 1¼"-thick salmon fillets in 15 minutes. Thawing times can vary, depending on the volume, temperature, and movement of the water, as well as the food's thickness and how it's wrapped. **(A lot of plastic swaddling interferes with heat transfer. It's best to remove it and place the food in a thin, resealable plastic bag, partly immersing it to force the air out before zipping it shut.)"**[1]

WHEN DO YOU "TEMPER" MEAT?

If you cook meat right out of the fridge, you typically risk having "black and blue" meat—overcooked on the outside and undercooked on the inside. Dee-sgusting.

So why *didn't* we let our rib eye come to room temp? Because we cooked it *low* and *slow*.

As a general rule, if cooking over 300°F (150°C), get the protein to room temperature first. The higher the heat (and shorter the cook time), the more important tempering to room temp is, whether it's eggs, steak, chicken, llama, or Gremlins.

If you want to try a more traditional high-temp steak recipe, see page 494 for Bistro-Style Bavette Steak.

WHY DO YOU USUALLY REST STEAK?

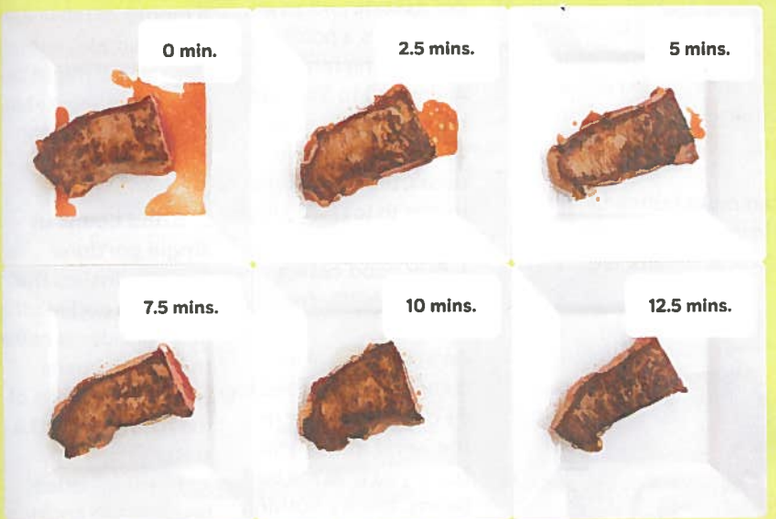
Meats cooked at 300°F (150°C) or above (or large pieces, like a roast) are left to rest for two reasons:

1) The semi-rare middle will continue to cook (heated, in essence, by the hotter layers around it). This is referred to as *carryover* cooking.

Let's say we'd cooked our rib eye in the oven at 350°F (180°C). We would have pulled it out of the oven when the probe thermometer hit 125°F (52°C). After 10 minutes or so of resting on the cutting board, the center temp would reach around 135°F (57°C).

2) The juices, which pool in the middle, need to redistribute. As the muscle fibers at the edges cool and relax, they reabsorb fluids.

If you were to chomp the steak straight out of the oven, the treasure juices you want in your maw would escape. Take a look at the pics below of identical steaks cut after different resting times.



HOW DO I UNF*CK OVERCOOKED MEAT?

Whenever possible, try to err on the side of undercooking versus overcooking, as you can always cook longer. But let's assume it's too late. You've turned your meat into shoe leather. There are at least two options for salvaging it:

1. If it's steak, mince it into hamburger-like meat and combine it with scrambled eggs. (I use a stick blender with chopper attachment for this.)

2. If you've slow-cooked something for 3+ hours and it's overcooked (which is possible, even if cooked in liquid), forge ahead. Continue cooking it for another 2 hours to turn it into a meat sauce, not unlike the amazingly simple *peposo notturno* (Google it).