



# Slow Cooker Top Tips

The slow cooker is a versatile, efficient, and cheap way of cooking some amazing meals. It's not just for stews and casseroles, the slow cooker can make bread, cakes, chillies and so much more. An item of cookware that so many people only use in the winter and then put it back in the cupboard until the next cold spell. The average slow cooker can operate for as little as 6 pence per hour so even if a dish requires 6 hours of cooking it will only cost 36 pence, this makes the slow cooker awesome for our Cost to Cook budgets.

When using the slow cooker, we have some handy tips and advice to make this form of cooking safe, enjoyable and tasty.

1. **Think Before You Swap** – Although we love a good swap or substitute, have a think about what you're buying. If the recipe uses lean meat swapping for a fatter alternative will almost definitely change the dish in looks and flavour, plus the dish may be over or under cooked. With this in mind think before you swap.
2. **Colour Me Right** – Searing meat and sausages before putting them in the slow cooker will help with looks and flavour, the slow cooker is great but seal in the juices and flavour first to ensure a rich fully flavoured dish.
3. **Don't Over/Underfill** – If during cooking the lid starts to rattle and steam or liquid is coming from the slow cooker it is overfilled. If when cooking, there is a hard solid mess at the bottom of the slow cooker there was not enough food in it. For ultimate slow cooking, half to three quarters full is what we are aiming for. If the contents are less reduce the cooking time, conversely if the mix is over filled remove some and cook it later don't let all your hard work spill over the top!
4. **Size Matters** – Try to chop all vegetables and meat to a uniform size based on density. Hard and solid veg needs to be cut to a size that can easily slow cook. Carrots bigger than a 1cm square are going to take longer to cook due to the density of the vegetable. The same size piece of courgette could be indistinguishable after cooking for the same time.
5. **Don't Be Tempted To Look** – Every time you lift the lid to look the heat will escape and your food will take longer to cook. We all know that some foods need stirring but only once or twice during cooking and make the stirring quick to keep the heat in.
6. **Thicken It Up** – Sauces may need thickening as no moisture is able to escape when slow cooking. Don't be worried if the sauce looks watery or runny just pop it on the hob and thicken with some cornflour or starch.
7. **Cheese At The End** – No-one likes to try to eat stringy, rubbery cheese. Dishes with cheese on the top should be delicious, not rubbery. Any dish to be topped with cheese can be, but hold off until the last 10 - 15 minutes of cooking, this will melt to perfection and add that beautiful top to your dish.
8. **Don't Just Grab It** – Remember the removable inner pot of the slow cooker will get hot so be careful when handling. Always use a cloth or protective gloves when handling hot cookware.
9. **Steam Collection** – If you are making items like bread or dishes that need a crispier finish simply place a clean tea towel between the pot and lid to absorb some the liquid in the steam. Remember to be careful when removing, as the cloth will be hot and damp.