

# Basic Wet Curing (brining)

## Prep Time:

10-15 minutes of work

3+ days of curing

2-24 hours of cooking

## Equipment:

Scale

Fridge

Smoker (optional)

## Ingredients:

Beef, Pork, Chicken etc (whole muscles and not ground meat)

Salt (fine grain and non-iodized)

Curing salt #1 (aka pink salt #1 or Prague powder #1)

[Optional] Sweetener

[Optional] Spices/seasonings

## Notes:

- Dry-curing is a better option for high quality pork and any well-marbled meat. Brining is a good for leaner meats and commodity pork.
- This brining method can be used for poultry, but the cure #1 can be omitted. Smoking temp. must always be above 150 F. and the final internal temp. must be 160 F.

## Steps:

1. Weigh the meat you wish to cure. Either grams or pounds (to the hundredth of a lb.) are easiest. Using ounces is difficult and NOT recommended.
2. The total amount of brine needed is 50% the weight of the meat and concentration of the brine should be 10%. There is a somewhat complicated way to figure out a brine that is precisely 50% the weight and 10% salt. However, to simplify things slightly, what follows will get you close enough and only has minimal math.
3. The salt will be 10% the weight of the water. And the cure will be 15% of the weight of the salt. Round all the calculations up to the next gram or hundredth of a pound (10.2 g becomes 11 g or .542 lbs. becomes .55 lbs.).

### Example for a 5 lb piece of meat:

**5 lb. meat x 50% = 2.5 lbs. of water**

**2.5 lbs. of water x 10% = .25 lbs. of salt**

**.25 lbs. of salt x 15% = .04 lbs. of cure #1 (rounded up from .0375 lbs.)**

4. Mix water, salt and curing salt #1 until everything is dissolved.
5. If desired, add sweetener like brown sugar, honey or maple syrup. As a baseline, use 50% of the weight of the salt that was added. Use up to 100% if you want a very sweet ham.

6. If you want to add any spices or aromatics for flavoring, be sure they are water soluble like garlic, onion, allspice. Spices like black pepper, chili powder and most anything else will be wasted in a brine. Save non-water-soluble spices until the brining is finished and coat the meat before smoking.
7. Mix again to incorporate any sweetener and spices.
8. Add the meat to the brining container.
9. Weigh down the meat to ensure it is completely submerged. Press a piece of plastic wrap down onto the surface of the brine.
10. Store covered in fridge at least 1 day for each half inch of thickness. You may cure for up 1 week longer if needed. Turn the meat each day. **For highly marbled cuts of pork or beef, allow 2 days for each half inch of thickness.**
11. After curing period is finished, remove the meat from the bag or container and allow to dry and equalize for at least 8 hours and up to a day or so. Resting uncovered on a rack in the fridge is good or anywhere that is less than 55 F.
12. Smoke the meat. The curing allows you to safely cold smoke long periods of time at temperatures <140° F if desired. Smoking times are mostly about preference, but roughly speaking hams are good at 6-12 hours. Recommended that you avoid woods with bitterness like mesquite and hickory or if you do choose those woods shorten the smoke times.
13. If you want to be able to eat your ham cold or at room temperature, it must be fully cooked/smoked to 150 F. Use your smoker or oven with medium low heat (170° - 225°) and slowly heat the meat until an internal temperature of 150° F.
14. For a darker and crustier bark, finish in the smoker or oven at higher temp. of 250 – 300 F and glaze if desired. **MONITOR CLOSELY AND DO NOT OVERCOOK.**
15. If you plan on re-heating your ham later as a whole piece or cutting into ham steaks, there is no need to smoke up to a finishing temp. of 150 F. Just cold smoke for as long as desired and don't worry about cooking it. Ham will be moister and have a better taste and texture if only cooked once and not re-cooked at second time.
16. In general, cured smoked meats may be kept in the fridge for several weeks. Better to keep them wrapped in wax paper or a brown paper bag than plastic. For long storage, vacuum sealing and freezing is best. Properly sealed with no air in the bag, meats will last a year or more in freezer.