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How to adjust for a convection oven

Photo Courtesy: Visage/Stockbyte/Getty Images We've always known the fast pace of modern life goes hand in hand with the convenience of microwave cooking. More recently, the unforeseen events of 2020 taught us that even when the world slows down, we still need the convenience of a reliable microwave when we just can't face cooking another meal. From defrosting the chicken you forgot to take out of the freezer to quickly reheating leftovers, a microwave is an essential tool to make life easier for your family — but it doesn't have to end there. Like most appliances, microwaves come in a range of quality levels. You don't have to spend a lot on a model, but investing in the best microwave you can afford definitely results in some cooking benefits. Many of the best microwave ovens come with additional features, such as grilling and broiling capabilities on specific Emerson and Panasonic models and Smart Sensor technology on Toshiba models to maximize the cooking of common foods like baked potatoes, pizza and popcorn. Check out these options and others to find the best microwave oven for your kitchen. When it comes to searching for the best microwave oven, you can't beat the Toshiba EM131A5C-SS microwave oven with Smart Sensor Technology. This unit puts function and convenience at your fingertips, with popcorn and defrost settings and plenty of power. It's energy-efficient, especially when you use the eco mode. More than 1,000 reviewers love this microwave enough to give it five stars, and they love how well it cooks. If you're looking for an inexpensive option, give the AmazonBasics microwave a look. This compact unit is functional and versatile, with quick settings and a large display. One of the most interesting features of this one is that you can use it with your Amazon Echo for voice control. More than 1,300 reviewers give it five stars for its value and convenience, earning it a spot on this best microwave list. If you have young children around the house, you know how important safety is in the kitchen. The BLACK+DECKER EM036AB14 digital microwave oven is one fewer appliance for you to worry about. It does everything you expect it to, but it also has a child safety lock that prevents kids from getting hot items out — now that's worth a best microwave rating! Reviewers love the size and functionality that this microwave offers. If you're looking for a microwave oven for the office breakroom, check out the Toshiba EM925A5A-BS microwave oven. This compact unit doesn't trade power for size, and you can count on it to cook your food thoroughly every time. One function that makes it best microwave quality for the office is the mute feature that allows you to turn off sounds. Consumers also love the efficiency and operation of this microwave. The Toshiba EM131A5C-BS microwave oven with Smart Sensor Technology performs as nicely as it looks. This sleek, stainless steel microwave is robust and efficient. You'll love the large display and easy-to-read buttons, but the best microwave feature on this one is the sensor system that cooks your food with maximum efficiency to achieve the best quality. More than 1,000 reviewers give this unit five stars for its effectiveness and cooking accuracy. Sometimes a microwave is more than just a microwave. The Panasonic countertop microwave oven with FlashXpress Broiler has built-in broiler capabilities that allow you to cook food to crispy deliciousness with the press of a button. It has a huge turntable, and you can program it to start at a later time. Around 60 percent of reviewers rated it a best microwave with five stars for its power and convenience. If you're interested in a microwave that also grills, you're in luck. The Emerson grillier microwave oven with touch control is not only a quick-cooking, heavy-duty microwave, but it's also a handy indoor grilling appliance. You'll love how much more you can do in the kitchen with this unit. Consumers rave about the versatility and efficiency, with many commenting that it's the best microwave they ever owned. If your design tastes run toward the era before microwaves were common, you'll fall in love with the Nostalgia RMO4RR Retro countertop microwave oven. This appliance gives you preprogrammed settings and a rotating turntable, and it's easy to clean. Best of all, it looks like it comes straight from the 1950s, despite the era being decades before the appliance's invention. Reviewers praise this cute microwave for its retro charm. If you have a shiny new convection oven on your counter, or a wall oven that includes convection capabilities, you may be thinking, "Cool! But what does the convection setting do?" That's a good question. What is a convection oven really? Do you just turn it on? Well ... not exactly. Convection ovens take a little practice to use with your favorite recipes because they can affect how dishes turn out. Let's go over everything you need to know about convection ovens and how to cook with convection properly. Setting the temperature The "convection" in convection ovens refers to heating via air. A convection oven still uses traditional heating methods, but it adds an airflow cycle that blows hot air across the cooking dish and vents it back out again. Basically, this means your food is being cooked by both radiant heat and heated air passing over the food. This speeds up the cooking process, but it also offers other advantages: Food in convection ovens tends to cook more evenly without experiencing "hot spots," and it's easier to brown foods a bit for a delicious crunchy crust when appropriate. In fact, convection cooking is so efficient that you will need to begin by adjusting the temperature down for your recipes. This saves energy and ensures your food will cook as expected instead of cooking too quickly. Here, we offer three important rules to serve as guidelines: For shorter cooking times and easy projects (like cookies), lower the expected temperature by 10% to 15%. For big cooking projects that will take a lot of time (like roasts), lower the temperature by as much as 30% for reliable cooking. When in doubt, drop the regular cooking temperature by 25 to 30 degrees. Give the air as much room as possible Since convection cooking depends a lot on air, it's important to give that circulating air room to do its work. Convection cooking is not the time to fill the oven rack with every pan you can squeeze in (we're looking at you, Thanksgiving!). Instead, limit yourself to one dish per rack to give the air plenty of space to move around. Your taste buds will thank you. Also, use low-profile pans and baking dishes when possible. Expose as much surface area of your food as possible to the moving air so it can cook reliably. Today's roasting pans and trays tend to have low sides, but if you have older cookware with a high profile, think about an update to improve convection results. Set your timer a bit early and check your dish Even with the temperature lowered, convection ovens can cook dishes faster than you might expect. To prevent unpleasant surprises, set your timer about 5 to 10 minutes earlier than you normally would (adjusting for the food and tray type), especially when first starting out. When the timer goes off, check your food. If it looks like it's doing nicely and could use several minutes to finish up, add a bit more time. But if your food has already browned over, is at a hard sizzle, or just looks done, you may want to cut your cooking time short to prevent drying out or burning. These foods do particularly well on convection Foods that roast or caramelize are an excellent fit for convection cooking. Many baked goods also perform very well in these conditions. Freely use your convection setting when: Roasting ham, turkey, roast-ready beef cuts, and similar meats Roasting vegetables for a little extra crisp Cookies and muffins—especially when you want to bake a lot at a time: These small foods defy our "leave plenty of space" rule because they have space, well, baked in ... although the air current may give your muffins a more curious shape Pies and pastry Covered casseroles — when casseroles have covers or foil, they won't lose much moisture, although convection settings may not be as effective in these situations Toasting breads or buns Drying foods out as part of meal prep — think dehydrating fish or roasting nuts Avoid convection with these foods Other foods you want to cook slowly, particularly delicate foods that need a very specific consistency. Avoid the convection option when: Cooking custards or flans — the delicate, spongy surface of these foods fares very poorly in a convection oven. Soufflés — likewise, a soufflé needs carefully controlled surface baking, and a convection oven might burn a soufflé without allowing it to rise. Cakes and similar large confectionary items, which tend to either rise too quickly and collapse or cook too fast. Baking quick breads — this might be confusing, since some cookies and pastries are considered short breads, but we are referring to breads that really need to rise but don't have traditional yeasts. That includes banana and pumpkin bread, cornbread, beer bread, and so on: You can cook many of these in convection ovens, but you have to be careful and keep a close eye on the process. Sensors and automatic features Hamilton Beach Convection ovens are trying to make the cooking process easier on us all by offering preset buttons, automatic temperature selection, and even "sensor cooking." Whether or not these options make things more efficient for you remains to be seen. Brands like LG have well-rated sensor cook options you can use with any dishes that you're unfamiliar with. The sensors function according to how they're programmed, so you might prefer to stay close when you're first using this option so you can change the temperature or cooking time if needed. When it comes to automatic cooking options, your most reliable option is a thermometer probe. These focus on setting accurate meat temperatures and are available on a growing number of home ovens. If you don't have one with your oven, you can buy one separately to ensure you're cooking meat properly. Editors' Recommendations 1 Celebrating Disability Pride Month and the History of the ADA 2 Can You Have a Pet Raccoon — and Are Raccoons Good Pets? 3 How Much Does a Case of Wine Weigh and More Facts 4 How Many Tickets Are in a Roll of Lottery Tickets? 5 Form 1099 G: What Is It, and What Does It Mean for Your 2020 Tax Return? 1 Shark Week 2021: Shark Info for Kids Who Are Fascinated By These Fish 2 What Is a High Level of Gamma GT? 3 What Is the Importance of Science in Everyday Life? 4 What Is Physical Education and Why Is It Important? 5 How Much Do Elephants Weigh in Tons? If you're thinking about buying an air fryer, you might be wondering what the difference is between air fryers and convection ovens. The quick answer is, an air fryer is a simply a smaller convection oven with a catchy name. There is no actual frying going on inside an air fryer—that's because an air fryer cooks food via convection baking. With actual deep-frying, your food is directly immersed in hot oil. The oil completely surrounds every inch of the food, so it gets uniformly crispy. With ordinary baking, your food gets less crispy, because baking cooks by surrounding your food with hot air and air is not as good a conductor of heat as oil. Convection baking introduces a fan to the interior of an oven, allowing hot air to be blown around and onto the food. The force of the air thus transfers more heat to the surface of the food, so that it produces more crispness than an ordinary oven (but still far less than an actual deep-fryer). So air fryers are, in essence, convection ovens. But that doesn't mean the two are exactly the same. Let's talk about what those differences are. Note that although many oven ranges offer a convection setting, for this discussion, we're solely comparing countertop convection ovens with air fryers. A countertop convection oven is built like a standard toaster oven: rectangular in shape with a front door that opens on a hinge at the bottom. How it differs from an ordinary toaster oven is that a convection oven is equipped with a fan, which blows hot air around. The motion of the air inside the oven is called a convection effect and it results in faster cooking by transferring higher temperatures to the surface of the food as compared with an ordinary oven. So it both accelerates cooking as well as enhances the browning and crisping of the surface of your food. Like a toaster oven, a convection oven has an interior rack that will fit a sheet pan (preferably a perforated one to allow maximum air flow). Because it's wide, it allows for the food to be spread out on the rack rather than stacked in layers. This is crucial, since stacking or layering food impedes the flow of hot air. Arranging the food in a single layer allows for even cooking all around. Essentially, an air fryer is a smaller, more portable convection oven. Instead of being shaped like a toaster oven, many air fryers are tall, sort of resembling a coffeemaker. It has a removable bucket with a handle, and inside that bucket fits a removable basket. This basket is where the food goes. The bucket slides into the device, you turn it on, and it starts to cook. The fan is situated overhead, above a heating element. Now, because it's smaller and the fan is closer to the food, an air fryer is able to focus a high amount of heat onto a relatively small cooking area. Which means that an item of food in that cooking area will cook more quickly than it would in a convection oven. However, because it is smaller, it will only accommodate a fraction of the amount of food that a convection oven will fit. An air fryer will really only cook about two servings at a time—if that. This means that if you are trying to feed more than one or two people, you'll have to cook in batches, so that ultimately it may take longer to serve a meal than it would using a convection oven. This creates a sort of catch-22, since the small size of the basket prevents you from spreading out an even layer of food, so you have to stack your food instead. But by stacking your food, you prevent the hot air from flowing evenly around it, thus defeating the purpose of the convection effect. Even when used according to the instructions, cooking French fries or onion rings in an air fryer requires you to periodically shake the basket to ensure that all the fries or rings cook evenly. So not only does it take longer to cook (because of having to cook in batches), you also have to physically do more work. With an air fryer, you can't see inside. This might not be super important, but being able to see your food can help judge doneness. Air fryers are louder than a convection oven. Philips says its air fryer generates 65 decibels, which is about as loud as a vacuum cleaner. An air fryer is more expensive than a comparable convection oven. A top air fryer might run \$250, but a \$150 convection oven will cook more food and more varieties of food (including toast.) Air fryers take up less space. A convection oven will pretty much have to live on your countertop full-time, whereas an air fryer can go in a cupboard when you're not using it (although because of its height, it might not fit in every cupboard). Air fryer cleanup is more difficult. With an air fryer, you have the perforated basket to clean along with the bucket that it fits in. If you're cooking something like chicken wings, there will be a lot of dripping. With a convection oven, you just clean the pan.

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