

Hot Dogs

Whether it is steamed, boiled, barbecued, or cooked over an open fire, the hot dog has become an American institution. But America cannot claim this noble delicacy. The hot dog is actually a type of sausage. Sausages have been around for hundreds of years, particularly in Europe. In Frankfurt, Germany, in the 1600s, a butcher created what came to be called the *frankfurter*, or “dachshund sausage.” The sausage was named after the dachshund – the hound used in hunting *dachs*, or “badgers” – because that’s what it looked like. In Vienna, Austria, another butcher had a similar idea for a sausage. This sausage was named after his city, *Wien*. This became the “wiener” sausage.

So where did the name “hot dog” come from? One cold spring afternoon, fans at the Polo Grounds, home of the New York Giants baseball team, were shivering as they watched their team play. Harry Mosley Stevens, a vendor, decided the fans needed something hot. He sent his men out into the neighborhood with instructions to get all the dachshund sausages they could find. When they returned, Stevens knew he needed a slogan to sell the sausages. He instructed the men to yell, “They’re red hot. Get your dachshund sausages while they’re red hot.” The sausages were a big hit.

Sitting in the crowd that day was Tad Dorgan, a cartoonist for the local paper. Seeing the popularity of the new fast food, he drew a cartoon showing two sausages barking at each other. But since he didn’t know how to spell *dachshund*, he simply called the sausages “hot dogs.” Stevens had to convince people that rumors that his sausages were made of dog meat were not true. Eventually, the name caught on and the hot dog became an American success.

Hot dogs gained international fame when President and Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt served them to the King and Queen of England in 1939. The dachshund sausage, with its humble beginnings, had become a star, and eventually, an American institution.

Unit 13

- Initially, people thought hot dogs were made out of dog meat. What are some ways Stevens might have convinced people to the contrary?

- Do you think the King and Queen of England were enthusiastic about trying the American hot dog? Why or why not?

- Hot dogs are an example of food that came to America as one thing and was transformed into another. What other foods have exceeded their origins?