

COOKING SKILLS

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2

Eggs in baking and sauces: custards, meringue, mayonnaise, hollandaise and soufflés.

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COOKING SKILLS: EGGS 2

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Cooking Skills: Eggs 2

Chapter 1 · Pancakes and Batters

SKILL GOAL

Make a smooth batter and cook it into a pancake, a drop scone or a Yorkshire pudding that rises properly.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

In Cooking Skills: Eggs 1 the egg was the dish. Here it is a team member. In a batter the egg gives structure (the proteins set and hold the shape), richness from the yolk and a little lift. A batter is just flour, egg and liquid, and the ratio of the three decides whether you get a paper-thin crêpe, a fluffy pancake or a tall Yorkshire pudding.

BATTER	THICKNESS	RAISING	COOKED IN
Crêpe (thin pancake)	Pours like single cream	None: egg and steam only	A hot, lightly oiled pan
American-style pancake	Thick, drops off a spoon	Baking powder	A medium pan, small rounds
Drop scone (Scotch pancake)	Thick, drops off a spoon	Self-raising flour	A medium pan or girdle
Yorkshire pudding	Like double cream	Steam from very hot fat	A very hot tin in a very hot oven

Five rules for any batter

- **Weigh the flour and measure the liquid.** A few grams out makes a very different batter.
- **Make a well** in the flour, crack the egg(s) into it, add a little of the liquid and whisk from the centre outwards, gradually pulling in the flour. This stops lumps. Add the rest of the liquid

gradually.

- **Rest it.** Crêpe and Yorkshire batters improve after 30 minutes (or overnight in the fridge): the flour absorbs the liquid and the gluten relaxes. Pancake and drop-scone batters are best used quickly, because the raising agent starts working.
- **Don't overmix thick batters.** A few small lumps are fine. Overmixing makes pancakes tough.
- **The first one is a test.** Use it to check the pan heat, then adjust. Nobody gets the first pancake right, and the cook gets to eat it.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Thin pancakes (crêpes)

15 minutes, plus 30 minutes' rest | makes about 8 | serves 2 to 4

The classic pancake-day batter. Learn to pour, swirl and flip.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

100 g	plain flour
2	medium eggs
300 ml	semi-skimmed milk
1 tbsp	sunflower or rapeseed oil, plus a little for the pan
Pinch	of salt

1. Sift the flour and salt into a bowl and make a well. Crack in the eggs, pour in about 50 ml of the milk and whisk from the middle, drawing in the flour, until you have a thick, smooth paste.
2. Gradually whisk in the rest of the milk and the oil until the batter is the thickness of single cream. Rest it for 30 minutes.
3. Heat a 20 cm non-stick frying pan over medium-high heat and brush with a little oil. Pour in a small ladle (about 45 ml) of batter, tilting the pan so it spreads thinly and evenly.
4. Cook for about **1 minute**, until the edges lift and the underside is golden. Flip with a spatula (or toss it, if you're feeling brave) and cook for 30 seconds more.
5. Slide onto a plate and cover with a clean tea towel to stay warm. Repeat, oiling the pan lightly every two or three pancakes.

SERVE WITH

Lemon and a little sugar, banana and a spoon of Greek yoghurt, or berries. For a savoury version, fill with ham and cheese or spinach and egg.

STORING

> Stack cooled pancakes with a piece of baking paper between each. They keep in the fridge for 2 days and freeze for 2 months.

LEVEL 2 · FLUFFY

American-style pancakes

20 minutes | makes about 8 | serves 2 to 3

A thicker batter raised with baking powder. Learn to judge when to flip by the bubbles.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

150 g	plain flour
2 tsp	baking powder
1 tbsp	caster sugar
1	medium egg
180 ml	semi-skimmed milk
1 tbsp	melted butter or oil, plus a little for the pan
Pinch	of salt

1. Mix the flour, baking powder, sugar and salt in a bowl.
2. In a jug, beat the egg with the milk and the melted butter. Pour into the dry ingredients and stir with a spoon or whisk only until just combined. A few lumps are good. The batter should drop thickly from a spoon: add a splash more milk if it is stiff.
3. Heat a non-stick pan over medium heat and brush lightly with oil. Spoon in the batter in rounds about 8 cm across (a heaped tablespoon each, leaving space).
4. Cook for **2 minutes**, until bubbles appear on the surface and the edges look set. Flip and cook for 1 to 2 minutes more, until golden and risen.
5. Keep warm in a low oven (100°C) while you finish the batch.

> **LIGHTER TOPPINGS**
>
> Berries, sliced banana and Greek yoghurt keep it healthy. Maple syrup and butter make it a treat.

LEVEL 2 · SCOTTISH

Drop scones (Scotch pancakes)

15 minutes | makes about 8 | serves 2

Smaller, thicker and quicker than American pancakes, and traditionally cooked on a girdle (a flat pan). A Scottish teatime classic. Good with butter and jam, or with berries.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

120 g	self-raising flour
1 tbsp	caster sugar
1	medium egg
150 ml	semi-skimmed milk
Pinch	of salt
A little	oil or butter, for the pan

1. Mix the flour, sugar and salt in a bowl and make a well. Add the egg and half the milk and whisk to a smooth paste, then whisk in the rest of the milk. The batter should be thick but drop easily from a spoon.
2. Heat a heavy frying pan over medium-low heat and rub it with a little oil on kitchen paper. It should be hot, not smoking.
3. Drop in large spoonfuls of batter (about 1 tbsp each), leaving gaps.
4. Cook for about 2 minutes, until bubbles form and burst on top. Flip and cook for another minute, until golden.
5. Cool on a wire rack under a tea towel so they stay soft.

LEVEL 3 · CONFIDENCE

Yorkshire puddings

30 minutes, plus 30 minutes' rest | makes 6 | serves 2 to 3

A batter with no raising agent that rises dramatically in very hot fat. It's the one batter here where heat matters more than anything else.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

70 g	plain flour
2	medium eggs
100 ml	semi-skimmed milk
6 tsp	sunflower or rapeseed oil (about 1 tsp per hole)
Pinch	of salt

1. Whisk the flour, salt and eggs together, then whisk in the milk to make a smooth batter the thickness of double cream. Rest it for 30 minutes (or overnight in the fridge).
2. Heat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7). Put 1 tsp oil into each hole of a 6-hole bun tin. Put the tin in the oven for **10 minutes**, until the oil is smoking hot.
3. Quickly pour the batter into a jug, take the tin out and pour it evenly into the holes (it should sizzle). Close the oven straight away.
4. Bake for **20 to 25 minutes** without opening the door, until well risen, golden and crisp. Serve at once.

> **HOT FAT**
>
> The tin and oil are extremely hot. Use thick oven gloves, pour carefully and keep your face back from the oven.

LEVEL 3 · HEARTY

Toad in the hole

50 minutes | 2 portions | a treat

Sausages baked in Yorkshire pudding batter. Cheap, filling and impressive. Choose good-quality sausages with a high meat content.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

4	pork sausages
1 tbsp	sunflower or rapeseed oil
70 g	plain flour
2	medium eggs
100 ml	semi-skimmed milk
Pinch	of salt
1	onion, sliced, for onion gravy (optional)
200 g	peas or green beans, to serve

1. Make the batter as for the Yorkshire puddings and rest it for 30 minutes.
2. Heat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7). Put the sausages in a metal baking dish about 20 cm square with the oil. Roast for **10 to 12 minutes**, turning once, until lightly browned.
3. Take the dish out of the oven and, working quickly, pour the batter round the sausages. It should sizzle.
4. Return to the oven and bake for **25 to 30 minutes**, until the batter is risen, golden and crisp. Don't open the door before 25 minutes.
5. Serve with the vegetables and gravy.

> **COOK SAUSAGES THROUGH**
>
> Pork sausages must be cooked until there is no pink inside and the juices run clear (at least 70°C in the middle). If in doubt, cut one open.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Rested vs unrested

Does resting the batter make a difference?

1. Make a crêpe batter and use half straight away.
2. Rest the other half for 30 minutes (or overnight in the fridge) and cook it the same way.
3. Compare the colour, the tenderness and how easily each tears.

Look for: Rested batter should give a smoother, more tender pancake that tears less.

EXPERIMENT

One egg or two

How much does the egg matter?

1. Make the crêpe batter with 1 egg instead of 2 (keep the other quantities the same) and cook a few.
2. Cook a few with the 2-egg batter and compare.

Look for: More egg gives a richer, more flexible, slightly more 'eggy' pancake. Less is more delicate and tears more easily.

EXPERIMENT

Milk vs milk and water

Pancake-makers argue about this.

1. Make the crêpe batter with all milk, then with half milk and half water.
2. Compare the lightness and the crispness at the edges.

Look for: Water gives a lighter, crisper pancake; milk is softer and richer. Which is your house crêpe?

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	BATTER OR METHOD	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Thin pancakes				
American-style pancakes				
Drop scones				
Yorkshire puddings				
Toad in the hole				
Rested vs unrested				
1 vs 2 eggs				
Milk vs milk and water				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Lumpy batter	Liquid added too fast	Whisk the flour with a little liquid into a paste first, or sieve the batter
Pancakes tear or stick	Pan too cool or not oiled	Heat the pan properly, and brush lightly with oil
First pancake is a mess	Pan not at the right heat yet	Treat it as a test and carry on
Thick, rubbery crêpes	Too much batter in the pan, or batter too thick	Use a smaller ladle, swirl quickly, and thin the batter with a splash of milk
Flat American pancakes	Old baking powder, or overmixed	Use fresh baking powder and stir only until just combined
Yorkshire puddings don't rise	Fat not hot enough, or the door opened	Heat the oil until it's smoking and don't open the oven for at least 20 minutes
Soggy middle in toad in the hole	Dish too cool, or underbaked	Use a metal dish, heat it well and bake until deep golden

FOOD SAFETY: BATTERS

Wash your hands after handling raw egg and wash bowls and whisks in hot soapy water. Don't taste raw batter. Cooked pancakes can be chilled and eaten within 2 days; reheat until steaming hot. Keep batter in the fridge and use within 24 hours.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make a smooth batter without lumps.
- ☐ I know why crêpe and Yorkshire batters are rested.
- ☐ I can tell when to flip a pancake by its surface.
- ☐ I can get Yorkshire puddings to rise by heating the fat first.
- ☐ I have a house batter I like best, written in my notes.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 2 is Stirred Custard: thickening milk with egg yolks without scrambling them.

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2

Chapter 2 · Stirred Custard

SKILL GOAL

Thicken milk with egg yolks into a smooth custard, without letting it curdle.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Real custard is milk thickened by egg yolks, and it's one of the best examples of what heat does to an egg. The yolk proteins start to thicken at about 70°C and the custard turns thick and glossy at about 80°C, but above about 85°C they clump and the custard curdles into scrambled egg. The whole skill is staying in that narrow window.

TEMPERATURE	WHAT HAPPENS
Below 70°C	Thin, runny, not yet cooked
70 to 80°C	Thickening; coats the back of a spoon at about 78 to 82°C
Above 85°C	Curdling: grainy, scrambled-egg texture
Boiling	Definitely scrambled

Method in brief

1. **Warm the milk** in a pan until steaming, not boiling.
2. **Whisk the yolks with the sugar** (and cornflour if you use it) in a bowl until pale and smooth.
3. **Temper:** pour the hot milk onto the yolks in a thin stream, whisking all the time, so the yolks warm up gradually instead of being shocked.
4. **Return to the pan** over the lowest heat and stir constantly with a wooden spoon or silicone spatula, scraping the base. Cook for 5 to 8 minutes until the custard coats the back of the

spoon: run a finger through it and the line should stay.

5. **Pour at once into a cold jug** through a sieve. Stop the cooking by getting it out of the hot pan. Stir in the vanilla.

A THERMOMETER HELPS

A digital probe thermometer makes custard much easier: take it off the heat at 80 to 82°C. No thermometer: the coat-the-spoon test is just as good once you've done it a couple of times.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Cornflour-stabilised custard

15 minutes | serves 2 | easiest custard

A little cornflour stops the yolks curdling and makes the custard forgiving. Start here, then try without it.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

250 ml	whole or semi-skimmed milk
2	medium egg yolks (keep the whites for chapter 6)
25 g	caster sugar
1 tsp	cornflour
½ tsp	vanilla extract

1. Heat the milk in a small pan until steaming.
2. Whisk the yolks, sugar and cornflour in a bowl until pale and smooth.
3. Pour the hot milk onto the yolk mixture in a thin stream, whisking.
4. Return to the pan over low heat and stir constantly for **3 to 5 minutes**, until the custard thickens and coats the back of a spoon. Don't let it boil.
5. Strain into a jug, stir in the vanilla and serve warm. Press cling film directly onto the surface if you are keeping it, to stop a skin forming.

LEVEL 2 · CLASSIC

Classic custard (crème anglaise)

20 minutes | serves 2 to 3 | no cornflour

The pouring custard the chefs make: yolks, sugar and milk only. It tastes cleaner, but it has no safety net. Follow the heat advice carefully.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

250 ml	whole milk
3	medium egg yolks
30 g	caster sugar
1 tsp	vanilla extract (or half a vanilla pod, split)

1. If you use a vanilla pod, put it in the milk, bring it to steaming and leave to infuse for 10 minutes; otherwise just heat the milk.
2. Whisk the yolks and sugar until pale. Pour the hot milk onto them gradually, whisking.
3. Return to the pan over the **lowest** heat and stir constantly in a figure of eight, scraping the base. After 6 to 8 minutes it should coat the back of a spoon, at about 80°C.
4. Immediately pour through a sieve into a cold jug and stir for 30 seconds to cool it. Add the vanilla extract if you didn't use a pod.

> **IF IT CURDLES**
>
> Take the pan off the heat at once, pour into a blender or use a stick blender for 20 seconds, then sieve. It will often smooth out. Failing that, it makes a very good scrambled-egg sauce for the cook.

LEVEL 2 · PUDDING

Baked apple with custard

35 minutes | 1 portion | healthy-ish pudding

Use your custard for what it is for: a warm fruit pudding with real custard on top. A small portion of custard goes a long way.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

1	large cooking or eating apple
1 tsp	raisins or sultanas
½ tsp	ground cinnamon
1 tsp	brown sugar or honey
80 ml	of the classic or cornflour custard from this chapter (about one third of a batch)

1. Heat the oven to 180°C fan (200°C conventional, gas 6). Core the apple and score a line round its middle (this stops the skin splitting).
2. Stand it in a small ovenproof dish. Fill the hole with the raisins, cinnamon and sugar, and add a splash of water to the dish.
3. Bake for **25 to 30 minutes**, until soft when you press it with a knife.
4. Pour the warm custard over the apple and serve.

LEVEL 3 · TREAT

Custard ice cream (stir-freeze)

30 minutes, plus chilling and freezing | serves 4 | a treat, and a first taste of ice cream

A rich custard base frozen in a tub, stirred a few times to break up the ice crystals. No machine needed. This is the method the Ice Cream course will build on.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

250 ml	whole milk
150 ml	double cream
4	medium egg yolks
60 g	caster sugar
1 tsp	vanilla extract

1. Heat the milk and cream until steaming. Whisk the yolks and sugar until pale, pour on the hot milk gradually, then cook gently in the pan as for the classic custard until it coats the back of a spoon (about 8 minutes).
2. Strain into a clean bowl, stir in the vanilla, and cool quickly by standing the bowl in a sink of cold water.
3. Chill in the fridge for at least 3 hours (overnight is better).
4. Pour into a shallow freezer-proof tub. Freeze for 1 hour, then beat well with a fork or a whisk to break up the ice crystals. Repeat every hour **3 times**, then freeze until firm.
5. Take it out of the freezer 10 minutes before serving.

> **LIGHTER SWAP**
>
> Use semi-skimmed milk and single cream instead. It won't be as smooth, but it's still good.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Cornflour or none

How much does the cornflour help, and does it change the taste?

1. Make the cornflour custard and the classic custard, side by side.
2. Take each off the heat as soon as it coats the spoon.
3. Taste both when they have cooled slightly.

Look for: How easy each was to cook without curdling, and whether the cornflour version feels thicker or tastes floury.

EXPERIMENT

Low heat vs medium heat

See what curdling looks like, on purpose.

1. Make two small batches of the classic custard. Cook one on the lowest heat, and one on medium heat.
2. Take the temperature if you have a thermometer.

Look for: The medium-heat custard curdles in a few seconds. Now you know the warning signs: grainy streaks on the spoon.

EXPERIMENT

Sieved or not

Does straining the custard matter?

1. Pour half the classic custard straight into a jug, and the other half through a sieve.
2. Compare the texture on the tongue.

Look for: Tiny bits of cooked egg that you can only feel when unsieved. A sieve is cheap insurance.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR HEAT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Cornflour custard				
Classic custard				
Baked apple with custard				
Custard ice cream				
Low vs medium heat				
Sieved vs unsieved				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Custard curdled (grainy)	Too hot, or too quick on the heat	Take off the heat, blend and sieve; use lower heat next time
Custard too thin	Not cooked long enough	Cook a little longer, stirring, until it coats the spoon
Skin on top	Left uncovered as it cooled	Press cling film onto the surface
Eggy taste	Overcooked, or old eggs	Use fresh eggs and a lower heat
Lumps of cooked egg	Yolks added to hot milk too fast	Add the milk in a thin stream, whisking all the time
Ice cream icy	Not stirred enough, or base too thin	Beat well each hour, and use full-fat milk and cream

FOOD SAFETY: CUSTARD

Custard is a perfect place for bacteria to grow. Cook it to about 80°C, cool it quickly (stand the pan in cold water), refrigerate within 2 hours and use within 2 days. Reheat gently until steaming hot. Don't eat uncooked custard base, or ice cream made from a base that wasn't cooked, if you're pregnant, elderly or very young.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can tell when custard coats the back of a spoon.
- ☐ I know why custard curdles and how to rescue it.
- ☐ I can temper yolks by adding hot milk slowly.
- ☐ I have a use for the egg whites I saved.
- ☐ I know which custard I prefer: cornflour or classic.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 3 is Baked Custards: setting custard gently in the oven, from egg custard to crème caramel.

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2

Chapter 3 · Baked Custards

SKILL GOAL

Set a custard in the oven so it's smooth and not weepy, and learn to judge doneness by the wobble.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A baked custard is the same idea as stirred custard (egg proteins thickening milk), but the oven does the stirring for you. The danger is the same too: too hot and the egg overcooks, turns grainy and weeps liquid. The answer is gentle, even heat, which usually means a water bath.

- **Oven:** low, **150°C fan** (170°C conventional, gas 3). Custard sets at about 80°C, and a hot oven pushes it past that around the edges.
- **Water bath (bain-marie):** stand the dishes in a roasting tin and pour hot water from the kettle into the tin until it comes halfway up the dishes. The water keeps the temperature around the custard at no more than 100°C and cooks it evenly.
- **Dishes:** ramekins (about 150 ml) or a 1 litre ovenproof dish. A deeper dish takes longer.
- **The jiggle test:** gently shake a dish. A set custard has a small wobble in the very middle, like a set jelly, but doesn't ripple across the surface. It firms up as it cools.
- **Strain the mixture** through a sieve before it goes in the dishes, for a silky texture and no stringy bits of white.
- **Skim the bubbles** off the top before baking, because they turn into holes.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Baked egg custard

50 minutes | serves 4 | healthy-ish

Simple, old-fashioned and just right for learning the jiggle test. Warm or chilled.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

500 ml	semi-skimmed milk
3	medium eggs
40 g	caster sugar
1 tsp	vanilla extract
Grating	of nutmeg
A little	butter, for greasing

1. Heat the oven to 150°C fan (170°C conventional, gas 3). Grease four 150 ml ramekins and stand them in a roasting tin. Boil the kettle.
2. Heat the milk in a pan until steaming (not boiling). Whisk the eggs, sugar and vanilla in a bowl, then pour the hot milk onto them in a thin stream, whisking.
3. Strain into a jug, skim off any bubbles, and divide between the ramekins. Grate a little nutmeg over each.
4. Pour hot water into the tin until it comes halfway up the ramekins. Bake for **30 to 35 minutes**, until set but with a slight wobble in the middle.
5. Lift out of the water and cool. Eat warm, or chill for 2 hours.

LEVEL 2 · NEXT STEP

Crème caramel

1 hour, plus chilling | serves 4 | a treat

A baked custard turned upside-down onto its own caramel sauce. It looks smart and takes no more skill than the last recipe, apart from the caramel.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

75 g	granulated sugar, for the caramel
2 tbsp	water
500 ml	semi-skimmed milk
3	medium eggs
1	medium egg yolk
40 g	caster sugar
1 tsp	vanilla extract

THE CARAMEL

1. Put the granulated sugar and water in a small, light-coloured pan over medium heat. Don't stir: just swirl the pan gently until the sugar dissolves.
2. Boil without stirring for 4 to 6 minutes, until it turns a deep amber (the colour of a conker). Watch it closely, because it goes from amber to burnt in seconds.
3. Pour at once into the bottom of four 150 ml ramekins, tilting to coat. Leave to set.

> **HOT SUGAR**
>
> Caramel is far hotter than boiling water and sticks to skin. Keep children away, don't taste it, and never put your fingers near it. If you spill any on your skin, run it under cold water at once for at least 10 minutes. Soak the pan in water afterwards to dissolve the leftover caramel.

THE CUSTARD

1. Heat the oven to 150°C fan (170°C conventional, gas 3). Warm the milk until steaming. Whisk the eggs, yolk, caster sugar and vanilla and pour on the milk, whisking.
2. Strain over the caramel in the ramekins. Stand them in a roasting tin, add hot water halfway up and bake for **30 to 35 minutes**, until set with a slight wobble.

3. Cool, then chill for at least 4 hours (overnight is best, because the caramel needs to melt into a sauce).
4. To serve, run a thin knife round the edge, put a plate on top, flip it over firmly and give it a shake. The custard drops out with the caramel running down it.

LEVEL 2 · COMFORT

Bread and butter pudding (lighter)

1 hour | serves 4 | uses day-old bread

A baked custard with bread and fruit in it. It uses more milk and less cream than the traditional recipe, and one spoonful of jam.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

4 slices	day-old white or brioche bread, crusts left on
15 g	butter, softened
1 tbsp	apricot jam
40 g	raisins or sultanas
3	medium eggs
400 ml	semi-skimmed milk
100 ml	single cream
2 tbsp	caster sugar
½ tsp	ground cinnamon
A little	extra butter, for greasing

1. Heat the oven to 160°C fan (180°C conventional, gas 4). Grease a 1 litre ovenproof dish.
2. Butter the bread thinly, spread a little jam on each slice and cut each into 4 triangles. Layer them in the dish, overlapping, scattering the raisins between.
3. Whisk the eggs, milk, cream and sugar and pour over the bread. Press the bread down gently and leave for 15 minutes to soak.
4. Sprinkle the cinnamon and a spoonful of sugar over the top. Bake for **35 to 40 minutes**, until the custard is set and the top is golden and crisp.
5. Rest for 5 minutes and serve warm.

LEVEL 3 · STOVE THEN OVEN

Creamy rice pudding with an egg finish

40 minutes | serves 2 | comforting

A stovetop rice pudding made richer with a single yolk stirred in at the end. It's a gentle lesson in tempering.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

50 g	pudding rice
400 ml	whole milk
1 tbsp	caster sugar
1	medium egg yolk
½ tsp	vanilla extract
Grating	of nutmeg

1. Put the rice, milk and sugar in a medium pan and bring to a gentle simmer. Cook on a low heat for 25 to 30 minutes, stirring often, until the rice is soft and the mixture creamy.
2. Beat the yolk in a small bowl. Take the pan off the heat, spoon 2 tbsp of the hot rice into the yolk and mix quickly (this tempers it). Stir the yolk back into the pan.
3. Return to a very low heat for 1 minute, stirring, without boiling. Add the vanilla and a grating of nutmeg.
4. Serve warm with berries or a spoon of jam.

> **STORING RICE**
>
> Cooked rice can carry bacteria that survive cooking. If you want leftovers, cool the pudding quickly, keep it in the fridge and eat it within 24 hours. Reheat until steaming hot, and only once.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Water bath vs no water bath

Does a bain-marie make a difference?

1. Make the baked egg custard in four ramekins. Bake two in a water bath and two on the tray, at 150°C fan.
2. Take both out at the same time and cool.
3. Cut each open and compare.

Look for: Smooth and silky against slightly firmer, with tiny holes or curdled edges. Which would you serve to friends?

EXPERIMENT

150°C vs 180°C

See what too hot does to a custard.

1. Make one batch of baked egg custard. Bake two ramekins at 150°C fan in a water bath and two at 180°C fan in a water bath.
2. Take them out when each is just set, noting the time.

Look for: Faster is not better: the hotter ones set quicker but are more likely to weep and have a rubbery edge.

EXPERIMENT

The jiggle test

Learn to judge doneness without a thermometer.

1. Bake four ramekins together. Take one out at 25, 30, 35 and 40 minutes.
2. Jiggle each when you take it out, then cool and cut.

Look for: How the wobble changes, and which minute gave the texture you like. That is the timing for your oven.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	TEMPERATURE OR TIME	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Baked egg custard				
Crème caramel				
Bread and butter pudding				
Rice pudding with egg				
Water bath vs none				
150°C vs 180°C				
Jiggle test times				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Custard is watery or weeping	Baked too hot or too long	Lower the temperature, use a water bath, and take it out while it still wobbles
Holes and bubbles	Whisked too hard, or oven too hot	Whisk gently, skim the bubbles, strain before baking
Not set in the middle	Not baked long enough	Bake 5 more minutes. The middle should wobble only slightly
Skin and cracks on top	Oven too hot, or no water bath	Use a water bath and lower the temperature, or cover loosely with foil
Crème caramel won't come out	Not chilled long enough, or caramel not melted	Chill overnight; stand the ramekin in hot water for 20 seconds before turning out
Burnt caramel	Cooked too long	Take it off at deep amber; start again, because a burnt caramel is bitter
Soggy bread pudding	Not enough baking, or too much liquid	Bake until the top is golden and the custard just set

FOOD SAFETY: BAKED CUSTARDS

Baked custards must be cooked until set. Cool quickly, refrigerate within 2 hours and eat within 2 days. Don't leave egg custards out at room temperature for long, particularly on a warm day. Use Lion-mark eggs for anyone vulnerable.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can set a custard in the oven with a water bath.
- ☐ I can recognise a set custard by the jiggle test.
- ☐ I can make caramel without burning it, and I know how to stay safe with it.
- ☐ I can turn out a crème caramel.
- ☐ I know how long my oven takes to set a custard in a ramekin.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 4 is Savoury Custards: quiche and its cousins, with a simple shortcrust case.

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2

Chapter 4 · Savoury Custards

SKILL GOAL

Bake a savoury egg custard in a pastry case with a crisp base and a silky filling.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A quiche is a baked custard with a savoury filling, and everything in the last chapter about gentle heat and the jiggle test applies. What is new is the ratio of egg to liquid, the pastry case and the fillings, which need pre-cooking so they don't add water.

RATIO (PER 20 CM QUICHE)	RESULT
1 egg to 100 ml liquid (3 eggs, 300 ml)	Soft, creamy, just-set slice; the classic
1 egg to 75 ml liquid (4 eggs, 300 ml)	Firmer, eggier, holds its shape
1 egg to 150 ml liquid (2 eggs, 300 ml)	Very soft and delicate; may not cut cleanly

- **Liquid:** a mix of milk and single cream is a good balance. All milk is lighter but less rich; all cream is richer than most people want.
- **Fillings:** cook meat and vegetables first and drain off any liquid. Wet fillings make a watery quiche and a soggy base.
- **Seasoning:** custard needs a good pinch of salt and pepper, plus a pinch of mustard powder or nutmeg.
- **Temperature:** 160°C fan (180°C conventional, gas 4). Any hotter and the custard overcooks before the pastry browns.
- **Rest:** let the quiche stand for 10 minutes before cutting, because it firms up as it cools. It's lovely warm or cold.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Savoury bread pudding

50 minutes | serves 4 | no pastry needed

A quiche without the pastry, using bread to hold the custard. The easiest way to learn the savoury custard ratio.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

4 slices	day-old bread, torn into pieces
100 g	mature Cheddar, grated
2	spring onions, sliced
1 tsp	wholegrain mustard
3	medium eggs
300 ml	semi-skimmed milk
Pinch	of salt and pepper
A little	butter, for greasing

1. Heat the oven to 170°C fan (190°C conventional, gas 5). Grease a 1 litre ovenproof dish.
2. Put the bread in the dish with the spring onions and two-thirds of the cheese.
3. Whisk the eggs, milk, mustard and seasoning. Pour over the bread and press down. Leave to soak for 10 minutes.
4. Scatter the rest of the cheese on top and bake for **30 to 35 minutes**, until golden and set.
5. Rest for 5 minutes. Serve with a salad.

LEVEL 2 · PASTRY

Simple shortcrust pastry case

40 minutes, plus chilling | makes one 20 cm case | or use shop-bought

The case for your quiche. It's quick to make by hand. Short of time, use a 320 g ready-rolled sheet of shortcrust pastry from a chiller instead: unroll it, line the tin and carry on from step 3.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

150 g	plain flour, plus extra for rolling
75 g	cold butter, cubed
2 tbsp	cold water
Pinch	of salt

1. Rub the butter into the flour and salt with your fingertips until it looks like breadcrumbs. Add the water a little at a time and bring it together into a ball with a knife. Don't knead. Wrap and chill for 30 minutes.
2. Roll out on a floured surface to about 3 mm thick and use it to line a 20 cm loose-bottomed tart tin, 4 cm deep. Press into the corners and trim the edge. Prick the base with a fork and chill for 15 minutes.
3. Heat the oven to 180°C fan (200°C conventional, gas 6). Line the case with baking paper and fill with baking beans or rice. Bake for **15 minutes**.
4. Take out the paper and beans, and bake for another **5 minutes**, until the base is pale gold and dry. This is **blind baking**, and it stops a soggy base.
5. If any cracks have appeared, patch them with a scrap of raw pastry, or brush the case with a little beaten egg and bake for 2 minutes to seal it.

> **EGG TO THE RESCUE**
>
> Brushing the hot, blind-baked case with beaten egg and putting it back in the oven for 2 minutes creates a waterproof seal against the custard. This is an egg wash doing a useful job.

LEVEL 3 · CLASSIC

Quiche Lorraine-style

1 hour 15 minutes | serves 4 to 6 | a treat

Bacon and cheese in a creamy custard: the classic. Use smoked bacon or lardons for flavour.

INGREDIENTS (5 PORTIONS)

1	blind-baked 20 cm shortcrust case (above)
150 g	smoked bacon lardons or chopped back bacon
1	small onion, finely chopped
50 g	Gruyère or mature Cheddar, grated
3	medium eggs
150 ml	semi-skimmed milk
150 ml	single cream
Pinch	of salt, pepper and nutmeg

1. Heat the oven to 160°C fan (180°C conventional, gas 4). Fry the bacon in a dry pan for 5 minutes until golden and cooked through. Add the onion and cook for 3 minutes more. Drain on kitchen paper.
2. Scatter the bacon, onion and half the cheese in the case.
3. Whisk the eggs, milk, cream and seasoning together and pour into the case. Scatter over the remaining cheese.
4. Bake for **25 to 30 minutes**, until golden and just set with a slight wobble in the middle.
5. Rest for 10 minutes before cutting. Serve with a green salad.

> **FILLING THE CASE**
>
> Pour in the custard with the case on the oven shelf, pulled out slightly, to avoid spilling it carrying it across the kitchen.

LEVEL 3 · VEGETARIAN

Spinach and cheese quiche

1 hour 15 minutes | serves 4 to 6 | vegetarian, lighter

A lighter, greener quiche. The skill is squeezing the water out of the spinach so the custard stays set.

INGREDIENTS (5 PORTIONS)

1	blind-baked 20 cm shortcrust case (above)
200 g	fresh spinach
1	small onion, finely chopped
1 tsp	olive oil
60 g	feta or mature Cheddar, crumbled or grated
3	medium eggs
200 ml	semi-skimmed milk
100 ml	single cream
Pinch	of salt, pepper and nutmeg

1. Heat the oven to 160°C fan (180°C conventional, gas 4). Soften the onion in the oil for 5 minutes. Add the spinach in handfuls and cook until wilted, 2 to 3 minutes.
2. Tip into a sieve and press hard with the back of a spoon to squeeze out as much water as you can. Chop roughly.
3. Spread the spinach and onion in the case and scatter over the cheese.
4. Whisk the eggs, milk, cream and seasoning and pour in. Bake for **30 minutes**, until set and lightly golden.
5. Rest for 10 minutes before cutting.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Blind-baked vs not

Is blind-baking worth the effort?

1. Line two small tart tins with pastry. Blind-bake one, and leave the other raw.
2. Fill both with the same custard and bake.
3. Cut each open and look at the base.

Look for: A crisp, golden base against a pale, soft, damp one. Most people decide it is worth 20 minutes.

EXPERIMENT

Cream, milk or half and half

What does the liquid do?

1. Make three small custards, each with 3 eggs and 300 ml of liquid: all milk, all single cream and half-and-half. Bake in ramekins at 160°C fan.
2. Taste them when just cool.

Look for: All milk is lighter and slightly firmer, all cream is rich and soft. Half-and-half is the compromise most people end up preferring.

EXPERIMENT

Egg-to-liquid ratio

Find the texture you like best.

1. Bake three ramekin custards: 2 eggs, 3 eggs and 4 eggs, each with 300 ml of half-and-half milk and cream.
2. Cut and compare when cool.

Look for: 2 eggs: soft and delicate, but hard to slice. 4 eggs: firm and eggy. 3 is the classic middle.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR RATIO	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Savoury bread pudding				
Shortcrust case				
Quiche Lorraine-style				
Spinach and cheese quiche				
Blind-baked vs not				
Milk / cream / half and half				
2 / 3 / 4 eggs				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Soggy base	Case not blind-baked, or wet filling	Blind-bake, seal with egg, and pre-cook and drain the filling
Pastry shrinks in the tin	Overworked pastry, or not chilled	Handle gently, and chill the lined case before baking
Pastry cracked and leaked custard	Cracks in the case	Patch with spare pastry and seal with beaten egg
Watery filling	Vegetables not drained, or oven too hot	Squeeze out spinach, pre-cook mushrooms, and bake at 160°C fan
Puffed up then collapsed	Oven too hot	Lower the temperature. Some puffing is normal and settles
Burnt edges, raw middle	Oven too hot, or uneven	Cover the edge with strips of foil; lower the temperature
Rubbery, curdled custard	Overbaked	Take it out while it still wobbles in the centre

FOOD SAFETY: QUICHE

Bacon and eggs in the filling must be cooked right through: the custard should be set and the bacon cooked. Cool quickly, refrigerate within 2 hours and eat within 2 days. Reheat slices until steaming hot (at least 70°C in the middle). Take care when carrying a hot dish with a runny filling.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make shortcrust pastry or choose a good shop-bought one.
- ☐ I can blind-bake a case and seal it with egg.
- ☐ I know the ratio of egg to liquid that I like.
- ☐ I pre-cook fillings so they don't make the quiche watery.
- ☐ I can tell when a quiche is set, and rest it before cutting.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 5 is Eggs in Cakes and Biscuits: what eggs do in baking, from an all-in-one sponge to egg-yolk shortbread.

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2

Chapter 5 · Eggs in Cakes and Biscuits

SKILL GOAL

Understand what the egg is doing in a bake, and make a sponge, a muffin, a biscuit and a glazed scone.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

In baking an egg does four jobs at once, and knowing which job it is doing tells you what to change when a bake goes wrong.

- **Structure:** the proteins set as they heat and hold the cake up. More egg means a firmer, springier crumb.
- **Lift:** beaten eggs hold tiny air bubbles, and heat makes them swell. A whisked sponge has no raising agent at all: the eggs do the lifting.
- **Richness:** yolk adds fat and a tender, moist crumb. That is why shortbread with a yolk is softer than shortbread without.
- **Colour and shine:** a brush of beaten egg gives a golden, glossy finish (egg wash).
- **Room-temperature eggs** mix more smoothly into butter and whip to a greater volume. Take them out of the fridge 30 minutes before, or stand them in warm tap water for 5 minutes.
- **Crack eggs into a cup** first, so a bad one or a bit of shell doesn't end up in the mixture.
- **Oven:** all the temperatures here are for a fan oven (add 20°C for conventional). Every oven differs, so use the times as a guide and check with a skewer: it should come out clean.
- **Don't open the oven door** in the first two thirds of the time, or a sponge can sink.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

All-in-one sponge

40 minutes | makes one 18 cm cake or 8 cupcakes | a treat

Everything goes in one bowl, which makes it a forgiving first cake. Eat it plain, or split and fill with jam and a spoonful of yoghurt for a lighter filling.

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

100 g	self-raising flour
100 g	soft butter or baking spread
100 g	caster sugar
2	medium eggs, at room temperature
1 tsp	baking powder
1 tbsp	milk
½ tsp	vanilla extract
A little	butter, for greasing

1. Heat the oven to 160°C fan (180°C conventional, gas 4). Grease and line an 18 cm round tin, or put 8 paper cases in a muffin tin.
2. Put everything in a large bowl and beat with a wooden spoon or an electric whisk for about 2 minutes, until pale and smooth.
3. Spoon into the tin or cases and level the top.
4. Bake for **25 minutes** (cupcakes: 15 to 18 minutes), until golden and springy and a skewer comes out clean.
5. Cool in the tin for 5 minutes, then on a wire rack.

> **DON'T LICK THE BOWL**
>
> Cake mixture contains raw egg and raw flour. Cooked, both are fine, but taste only the finished cake.

LEVEL 1 · BREAKFAST BAKE

Blueberry muffins

35 minutes | makes 6 | lighter with oil, not butter

A muffin is a one-bowl cake. The skill is the opposite of the sponge: mix as little as you can.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

200 g	plain flour
2 tsp	baking powder
60 g	caster sugar
1	medium egg
200 ml	semi-skimmed milk
50 ml	sunflower or vegetable oil
100 g	blueberries, fresh or frozen
Pinch	of salt

1. Heat the oven to 180°C fan (200°C conventional, gas 6). Put 6 paper cases in a muffin tin.
2. Mix the flour, baking powder, sugar and salt in a large bowl.
3. In a jug, beat the egg with the milk and oil. Pour it onto the dry ingredients and stir for no more than 10 seconds, until just combined. It should look lumpy.
4. Fold in the blueberries gently, then divide between the cases.
5. Bake for **20 to 22 minutes**, until risen and golden. Cool on a wire rack.

> **LUMPS ARE GOOD**
>
> Overmixing a muffin makes the gluten in the flour stretch, giving tunnels and a tough, chewy texture. A lumpy batter makes a tender muffin.

LEVEL 2 · BISCUITS

Egg-yolk shortbread

45 minutes, plus chilling | makes 12 fingers | a treat

Three ingredients and a yolk. The yolk makes the dough easier to handle and the biscuit tender and a little richer.

INGREDIENTS (12 PORTIONS)

150 g	plain flour
100 g	cold butter, cubed
50 g	caster sugar, plus extra for sprinkling
1	medium egg yolk
Pinch	of salt

1. Heat the oven to 160°C fan (180°C conventional, gas 4). Line a baking tray.
2. Rub the butter into the flour, sugar and salt with your fingertips until it looks like fine breadcrumbs. Add the yolk and bring it together into a dough, without kneading.
3. Press the dough into a rectangle about 1 cm thick on the tray. Prick with a fork and score into 12 fingers. Chill for 15 minutes.
4. Bake for **18 to 20 minutes**, until pale gold. Sprinkle with caster sugar, re-cut along the lines while hot, and cool on the tray.

LEVEL 2 · EGG WASH

Cheese scones with an egg glaze

35 minutes | makes 6 | good with soup

A scone dough is light and quick, and the glaze is what turns it from pale to bakery-golden.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

225 g	self-raising flour, plus extra for dusting
1 tsp	baking powder
50 g	cold butter, cubed
75 g	mature Cheddar, grated
2	medium eggs (one for the dough, one for the glaze)
80 ml	milk, plus a splash for the glaze
Pinch	of salt

1. Heat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7). Line a baking tray.
2. Rub the butter into the flour, baking powder and salt. Stir in two thirds of the cheese.
3. Beat one egg with the milk and add it, mixing with a knife into a soft dough.
4. Pat out to 2.5 cm thick on a floured surface and cut into 6 rounds with a 6 cm cutter. Don't twist the cutter or the scones will rise lopsided.
5. Beat the second egg with a splash of milk, and brush it only over the tops (egg dripping down the sides glues the scone to the tray). Sprinkle with the rest of the cheese.
6. Bake for **12 to 15 minutes**, until risen and deep gold.

LEVEL 3 · TECHNIQUE

Whisked (fatless) sponge

40 minutes | makes one 20 cm sponge | light and low in fat

There is no butter and no baking powder: the eggs do everything. It is a lovely light sponge for layering with fruit and yoghurt, and the best lesson in what whisked egg can do.

INGREDIENTS (8 PORTIONS)

3	medium eggs, at room temperature
75 g	caster sugar
75 g	plain flour, sifted
A little	butter and flour, for the tin

1. Heat the oven to 170°C fan (190°C conventional, gas 5). Grease and line a 20 cm round tin.
2. Put the eggs and sugar in a large bowl and whisk with an electric whisk for **5 to 8 minutes**, until thick, pale and tripled in volume. When you lift the whisk, the trail it leaves should sit on the surface for 3 seconds. This is called the ribbon stage.
3. Sift the flour over the top in two goes and fold it in gently with a large metal spoon, cutting down through the middle and turning the mixture over. Stop as soon as there are no streaks of flour.
4. Pour into the tin and bake for **18 to 20 minutes**, until golden and springy and the sponge shrinks slightly from the sides.
5. Cool in the tin for 5 minutes, then on a rack. Split, and fill with fruit and thick yoghurt.

> **BE GENTLE**
>
> Everything in this cake depends on the air in the eggs. Folding firmly pops the bubbles and gives a flat, rubbery cake.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Cold vs room-temperature eggs

How much difference does the temperature make?

1. Make the all-in-one sponge twice as cupcakes. Use eggs straight from the fridge in one batch and room-temperature eggs in the other.
2. Bake side by side, then cool and cut one of each in half.

Look for: The height, how smooth the mixture looked before baking, and the crumb. Often there is a small difference rather than a dramatic one.

EXPERIMENT

Whole egg or yolk only

See what white and yolk each give a biscuit.

1. Make three small batches of the shortbread dough: with a yolk, with half a beaten whole egg, and with no egg (add 1 tbsp cold water instead).
2. Bake them together and compare once cool.

Look for: The yolk gives a tender, rich biscuit. A whole egg gives a crisper, slightly cakey one. No egg is the crumbliest, and hardest to handle.

EXPERIMENT

Egg wash options

Which glaze do you prefer?

1. Make the scone dough and cut 4 scones. Brush one with whole beaten egg, one with yolk and a splash of milk, one with milk only, and leave one bare.
2. Bake them together on one tray.

Look for: Yolk gives the deepest gold and a high shine, whole egg a good all-rounder, milk a soft matt brown, and the bare scone stays pale.

Tasting notes

ITEM	METHOD	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
All-in-one sponge				
Blueberry muffins				
Egg-yolk shortbread				
Cheese scones				
Whisked sponge				
Cold vs room-temp eggs				
Shortbread: yolk / whole / none				
Egg wash options				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Cake sank in the middle	Oven door opened early, or oven too cool	Keep the door shut until the last third; check the oven temperature
Cake is dry	Overbaked, or too little fat or egg	Check 5 minutes early; a skewer should come out clean, not bone-dry
Mixture curdled when adding eggs	Eggs too cold	Use room-temperature eggs and add a spoonful of flour with each egg
Muffins tough with tunnels	Overmixed	Stir for 10 seconds, leaving lumps
Whisked sponge is flat and rubbery	Not whisked enough, or folded too hard	Whisk to ribbon stage and fold gently with a metal spoon
Shortbread spread and went greasy	Butter too warm	Chill the dough on the tray before baking
Scones lopsided	Twisted the cutter, or glaze dripped down the sides	Press straight down and glaze only the tops

FOOD SAFETY: BAKING WITH EGGS

Raw cake and biscuit mixtures contain raw egg, so don't taste them. Bake until cooked through. Use Lion-marked eggs, keep eggs in the fridge until 30 minutes before baking, and wash your hands, the bowl and the whisk after handling raw egg. Anything filled with fresh cream or yoghurt goes in the fridge and is eaten within 2 days.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I know the four jobs an egg does in baking.
- ☐ I can make a simple sponge in one bowl.
- ☐ I can whisk eggs and sugar to the ribbon stage and fold without knocking the air out.
- ☐ I can mix a muffin batter lightly and recognise a lump that is fine.
- ☐ I know which glaze gives which finish.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 6 is Meringue: whipping egg whites to the right stage, for kisses, nests and pavlova. Save the spare whites from the baking this week.

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2

Chapter 6 · Meringue

SKILL GOAL

Whip egg whites to stiff, glossy peaks and bake a meringue that is crisp outside and soft within.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A meringue is egg white whipped into foam, sweetened with sugar and dried in a low oven. It has only two ingredients, so technique is everything. The proteins in the white unfold as you whisk and trap air, and the sugar holds the foam steady.

- **Spotless equipment:** any trace of fat or yolk stops the whites from whipping. Use a clean glass or metal bowl (plastic can hold grease) and wipe the bowl and whisk with a little lemon juice or vinegar on kitchen paper.
- **Separate carefully:** do each white into a cup first, then tip it into the bowl, so one broken yolk doesn't spoil the batch. Cold eggs separate more easily, but whites whip higher at room temperature.
- **The stages:** foamy and bubbly, then **soft peaks** (the tip flops over), then **stiff peaks** (the tip stands up straight and the bowl can be held upside down).
- **Ratio:** 50 g caster sugar for each egg white (about 30 g). This is the classic. Less sugar is less stable and less sweet.
- **Add the sugar a spoonful at a time** once the whites are at soft peaks, whisking 10 seconds between spoonfuls. The meringue should be thick and glossy, and rub between your fingers without grittiness.
- **Oven:** low and slow, with the door closed. Meringue is dried rather than baked, so leave it in the oven as it cools.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Meringue kisses

1 hour 30 minutes, plus cooling | makes about 16 | fat-free, but sugary: a treat

Small meringues that dry quickly. They show you the stages in a small batch, and they are the building block for the next recipe.

INGREDIENTS (16 PORTIONS)

2	egg whites, at room temperature
100 g	caster sugar

1. Heat the oven to 110°C fan (130°C conventional, gas ½). Line two baking trays with baking paper.
2. Whisk the whites in a spotless bowl until stiff peaks form.
3. Add the sugar one tablespoon at a time, whisking for 10 seconds after each, until thick and glossy. This takes about 5 minutes.
4. Spoon or pipe small mounds onto the trays, about 4 cm wide.
5. Bake for **1 hour**, then turn off the oven and leave them inside for another hour or overnight, door closed. They should lift off the paper cleanly.

LEVEL 1 · ASSEMBLE

Eton mess

10 minutes | serves 2 | lighter with yoghurt

No cooking at all: broken meringue, berries and cream. It uses up meringues that cracked, and is a good way to eat the experiments.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

6	meringue kisses (above)
200 g	strawberries, hulled and chopped
100 ml	double cream
100 g	Greek yoghurt
1 tsp	icing sugar

1. Mash a third of the strawberries with the icing sugar to make a rough sauce.
2. Whip the cream until it just holds its shape and fold in the yoghurt.
3. Break the meringues into pieces. Just before serving, fold them into the cream with the remaining strawberries and ripple through the sauce.

> **SERVE AT ONCE**
>
> The meringue softens in the cream within about 30 minutes. Mix it at the last moment if you like it crunchy.

LEVEL 2 · BIGGER

Meringue nests

1 hour 30 minutes, plus cooling | makes 6 | a treat

The same mixture as the kisses, piped or spooned into rings, so you can fill them with fruit and yoghurt.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

3	egg whites, at room temperature
150 g	caster sugar
1 tsp	cornflour
1 tsp	white wine vinegar

1. Heat the oven to 120°C fan (140°C conventional, gas 1). Line a large baking tray.
2. Whisk the whites to stiff peaks. Add the sugar a spoonful at a time, whisking until thick and glossy, then whisk in the cornflour and vinegar for the last 20 seconds.
3. Spoon 6 mounds onto the tray and make a hollow in the middle of each with the back of a spoon, pulling up the edges.
4. Bake for **1 hour**, then turn off the oven and leave to cool inside with the door shut.
5. Fill with berries and a spoonful of thick yoghurt just before serving.

> **CORNFLOUR AND VINEGAR**
>
> A little cornflour and acid keep the inside soft and marshmallowy, with a crisp shell. It is the trick that separates a pavlova from a plain crisp meringue.

LEVEL 3 · SHOWPIECE

Pavlova

1 hour 30 minutes, plus cooling | serves 6 | a treat; lighter with fruit and yoghurt

One big meringue with a crisp shell and a soft centre. If the nests went well, this is the same method on a larger scale.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

4	egg whites, at room temperature
225 g	caster sugar
1 tsp	cornflour
1 tsp	white wine vinegar
150 g	Greek yoghurt
50 ml	double cream
300 g	mixed berries or passion fruit

1. Heat the oven to 140°C fan (160°C conventional, gas 3). Draw a 20 cm circle on baking paper and turn it over on a tray.
2. Whisk the whites to stiff peaks, then add the sugar a spoonful at a time, whisking until thick, glossy and smooth when rubbed between your fingers. Whisk in the cornflour and vinegar.
3. Pile onto the circle, shaping into a round with a slight dip in the middle.
4. Put in the oven and immediately turn the temperature down to 120°C fan (140°C conventional, gas 1). Bake for **1 hour**, until the shell feels dry. Switch off the oven and leave inside to cool completely (a couple of hours, or overnight).
5. Whip the cream lightly and fold in the yoghurt. Top the pavlova just before serving and add the fruit.

LEVEL 3 · POT DESSERT

Lemon meringue pots

30 minutes | serves 4 | uses shop-bought or home-made curd

A topping on lemon curd in individual dishes, finished with a short blast in a hot oven. It is cooked through, so it is safe for everyone.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

4 tbsp	lemon curd (or the home-made curd from chapter 9)
2	egg whites, at room temperature
100 g	caster sugar
4	ramekins or ovenproof glasses

1. Heat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7). Put a tablespoon of curd in each ramekin and stand them on a tray.
2. Whisk the whites to stiff peaks and then the sugar, a spoonful at a time, until glossy.
3. Pile on the curd, making peaks with the back of a spoon so there are lots of points to brown.
4. Bake for **5 to 7 minutes**, until the tips are golden. Watch closely, because they catch quickly. Serve warm or cold.

> **A BLOWTORCH ALSO WORKS**
>
> If you own a cooking blowtorch, brown the tops with it instead of the oven. Keep the flame moving.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Cold vs room-temperature whites

Does temperature change the volume?

1. Separate 2 whites. Leave one in the fridge and let the other warm up for 30 minutes.
2. Whisk each with the same electric whisk for the same time (for example, 2 minutes) before adding any sugar.
3. Compare the volumes in the bowls.

Look for: Room-temperature whites reach a bigger, stiffer foam. Cold whites are fine for most uses but take longer.

EXPERIMENT

Sugar fast or slow

See why you add it gradually.

1. Make two half batches of the meringue kisses (1 white, 50 g sugar each). In one, add all the sugar after the soft-peak stage in one go. In the other, add it a spoonful at a time.
2. Pipe both onto one tray and bake together.

Look for: Dumped sugar makes a heavier, grainy meringue that may weep syrup. The gradual batch should be glossy, stiff and smooth.

EXPERIMENT

Oven temperature and drying time

Find the crispness and colour that you like.

1. Make one batch of kisses and bake half at 100°C fan for 1 hour 30 minutes, and half at 130°C fan for 45 minutes.
2. Cool them in the oven, then snap one of each.

Look for: Low and slow stays white and brittle all the way through. Hotter browns slightly with a chewier middle, and may crack.

Tasting notes

ITEM	METHOD	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Meringue kisses				
Eton mess				
Meringue nests				
Pavlova				
Lemon meringue pots				
Cold vs room-temp whites				
Sugar fast vs slow				
Oven temperature				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Whites won't whip	Grease, yolk or a plastic bowl	Start again with a clean glass or metal bowl, and wipe it with lemon juice
Grainy meringue	Sugar added too fast or not dissolved	Add it a spoonful at a time and whisk until it is no longer gritty
Weeping beads of syrup	Too much sugar, or undermixed, or a humid day	Whisk longer, use the correct ratio and bake on dry days
Cracked pavlova	Oven too hot, or cooled too quickly	Cool in the oven with the door shut. A few cracks are normal
Meringue stuck to paper	Not dry enough	Leave it in the cooling oven longer
Meringue turned brown or chewy	Oven too hot	Lower to 100 to 120°C fan
Flat, runny pavlova	Whites over- or underwhisked, or yolk got in	Whisk to stiff glossy peaks and separate more carefully

FOOD SAFETY: MERINGUE

Fully baked meringue is safe. A pavlova filled with cream should go in the fridge and be eaten the same day. Never use un-baked whipped white (in a mousse or frosting) for anyone vulnerable; use pasteurised egg white instead.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can separate eggs cleanly and keep the whites free of yolk.
- ☐ I can whisk whites to soft and stiff peaks.
- ☐ I add sugar gradually and can feel when it has dissolved.
- ☐ I can make meringue nests and a pavlova with a crisp shell and soft centre.
- ☐ I know how to use up cracked meringue.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 7 is Mayonnaise and Emulsions: taking the yolk the other way, and turning oil into a smooth sauce. You will need yolks, so freeze any leftover whites.

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2

Chapter 7 · Mayonnaise and Emulsions

SKILL GOAL

Turn oil and yolk into a smooth, stable sauce, and know how to rescue it when it splits.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Oil and water don't mix. An emulsion is a mixture of the two that stays together, and egg yolk is the classic emulsifier: it contains lecithin, which grabs on to both oil and water. Mayonnaise is simply yolk, a little acid and oil, whisked until the oil breaks into tiny droplets suspended in the yolk.

- **Everything at room temperature.** A cold yolk or cold oil makes it harder to emulsify.
- **Start with a drop at a time.** For the first quarter of the oil, add it drop by drop while whisking constantly. Once the mixture thickens you can pour in a thin stream.
- **Mustard helps.** A teaspoon of Dijon mustard is also an emulsifier and gives a safety margin.
- **Acid:** lemon juice or vinegar adds flavour and loosens the mixture. Add a little at the start and the rest at the end, to taste.
- **Oil:** a light-tasting oil (sunflower, rapeseed or groundnut) lets the egg and lemon come through. Extra-virgin olive oil on its own can taste bitter in mayonnaise, so blend it with a lighter oil.
- **Steady the bowl:** stand it on a damp cloth so it doesn't slide while you whisk.

RAW EGG

Fresh mayonnaise is made with raw egg. Use Lion-marked eggs, and use pasteurised liquid egg yolk (sold in cartons) if you are cooking for anyone pregnant, elderly, very young or unwell. Keep homemade mayonnaise in the fridge and use it within 3 days.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · BY HAND

Mayonnaise by hand

15 minutes | makes about 150 ml | a treat in small amounts

The slow way, and the best way to feel how an emulsion forms. It takes some arm work.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1	medium egg yolk, at room temperature
1 tsp	Dijon mustard
150 ml	sunflower or light rapeseed oil
2 tsp	lemon juice, or white wine vinegar
Pinch	of salt

1. Put the yolk, mustard, salt and half the lemon juice in a bowl and whisk for 30 seconds.
2. Whisking all the time, add the oil **a few drops at a time**. After about 6 teaspoons, the mixture should be thick and look like pale butter.
3. Now pour the rest of the oil in a thin, steady stream, still whisking.
4. Stir in the rest of the lemon juice and taste. Add more salt or lemon if it needs it. If it is too thick, whisk in a teaspoon of warm water.

LEVEL 1 · QUICKER

Stick-blender mayonnaise

5 minutes | makes about 200 ml | no skill but a tall jug

The reliable shortcut. A whole egg, everything in one tall jug, and a stick blender. It works because all the ingredients are right next to the blades.

INGREDIENTS (6 PORTIONS)

1	medium egg, at room temperature
1 tsp	Dijon mustard
1 tbsp	lemon juice or white wine vinegar
200 ml	sunflower or light rapeseed oil
Pinch	of salt

1. Put everything in a tall, narrow jug that just fits the head of the stick blender, with the egg going in first and the oil on top.
2. Put the blender on the bottom of the jug, switch it on and **don't move it** for 15 seconds, while the mayonnaise forms at the base.
3. Slowly tilt and lift the blender to pull the rest of the oil down into it. The whole job takes about a minute.
4. Taste, and add salt or lemon if needed.

> **A LIGHTER SWAP**
>
> For everyday sandwiches, stir 1 part mayonnaise into 1 part thick Greek yoghurt. You keep much of the flavour for half the fat.

LEVEL 2 · FLAVOURED

Aioli

10 minutes | serves 4 | strong flavour

Mayonnaise's garlicky cousin, good with chips, grilled fish, boiled eggs and raw vegetables.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

1 batch	hand-made mayonnaise (above), made with half sunflower and half extra-virgin olive oil
2	garlic cloves, crushed to a paste with a pinch of salt
1 tsp	lemon juice, to taste

1. Make the mayonnaise by hand or with the stick blender, using half extra-virgin olive oil and half sunflower oil.
2. Stir in the garlic paste and lemon juice. Taste and add more garlic if you like.
3. Rest in the fridge for 30 minutes so the flavour develops.

LEVEL 2 · SAUCE

Tartare sauce

10 minutes | serves 4 | for fish and chips

Mayonnaise with chopped pickles and herbs. It's the classic with fish, and much better home-made.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

4 tbsp	mayonnaise (above), or half mayonnaise and half Greek yoghurt
2	gherkins, finely chopped
1 tbsp	capers, rinsed and chopped
1 tbsp	chopped fresh parsley
1 tsp	lemon juice

1. Mix everything together in a small bowl and taste.
2. Chill for 15 minutes. Keeps for 2 days in the fridge.

LEVEL 3 · DRESSING

Caesar-style dressing and salad

15 minutes | serves 2 | healthy-ish

A creamy dressing built on mayonnaise, with crisp salad and homemade croutons. A little Parmesan goes a long way.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

3 tbsp	mayonnaise (above)
2 tbsp	finely grated Parmesan, plus a little to serve
1 tsp	lemon juice
½ tsp	Worcestershire sauce (contains anchovy)
1	small garlic clove, crushed
1 tbsp	cold water
1	cos or romaine lettuce
2 slices	day-old bread, cubed
1 tsp	olive oil

1. Heat the oven to 180°C fan (200°C conventional, gas 6). Toss the bread cubes with the oil and bake on a tray for 8 to 10 minutes, until golden and crisp.
2. Whisk the mayonnaise, Parmesan, lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce and garlic. Add the water to make a pouring consistency.
3. Tear the lettuce into a bowl, toss with the dressing and top with the croutons and a little more Parmesan.

> MAKE IT A MEAL
>
> Add a soft-boiled egg (see Cooking Skills: Eggs 1, chapter 2) or sliced cooked chicken.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Oil slowly or all at once

See an emulsion split, on purpose.

1. Make two half batches of hand-made mayonnaise (1 yolk, 100 ml oil). In one, add the oil drop by drop at the start. In the other, pour a quarter of the oil in at once.
2. Whisk both for the same time.

Look for: The slow batch thickens and holds. The fast batch usually looks like thin, oily yellow liquid: it has split. That's the failure you will learn to rescue.

EXPERIMENT

Lemon or vinegar

Which acid do you prefer?

1. Make two small batches of stick-blender mayonnaise, one with lemon juice and one with white wine vinegar. Use the same amounts.
2. Taste each on a boiled potato or a teaspoon.

Look for: Lemon is fresh and fruity, vinegar is sharper and more savoury. Try cider vinegar and lime juice too.

EXPERIMENT

Rescue a split mayonnaise

Don't throw it away.

1. Take the split mayonnaise from the first experiment. In a clean bowl, whisk a fresh yolk and a teaspoon of mustard.
2. Add the split mixture **a few drops at a time** to the new yolk, whisking, until it comes together. Then pour more steadily.

Look for: A smooth, thick sauce again, with a little more volume than before. A teaspoon of warm water can also bring a split sauce back.

Tasting notes

ITEM	METHOD	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Mayonnaise by hand				
Stick-blender mayonnaise				
Aioli				
Tartare sauce				
Caesar-style dressing				
Slow vs fast oil				
Lemon vs vinegar				
Rescued mayonnaise				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Mayonnaise split (oily and thin)	Oil added too fast, or ingredients too cold	Start again with a fresh yolk and add the split mixture slowly
Too thick	Too much oil for the yolk	Whisk in a teaspoon of warm water or lemon juice
Too thin	Not enough oil, or the emulsion is just forming	Keep adding oil slowly while whisking
Bitter taste	Extra-virgin olive oil used alone	Blend with sunflower or rapeseed oil
Stick-blender mayo won't thicken	Jug too wide, or you moved the blender too early	Use a narrow jug and keep the blender on the bottom for 15 seconds
Greasy, heavy flavour	Too much oil	Add more lemon, or mix with Greek yoghurt
Tastes flat	Not enough salt or acid	Season in small stages, tasting each time

FOOD SAFETY: RAW-EGG SAUCES

Mayonnaise, aioli, tartare and Caesar dressing all contain raw egg. Use Lion eggs, keep sauces in the fridge, make them in a clean bowl, and throw them away after 3 days. Don't serve them to anyone vulnerable unless you have used pasteurised egg yolk or a shop-bought mayonnaise.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I know what an emulsion is and why egg yolk makes one.
- ☐ I can make mayonnaise by hand and with a stick blender.
- ☐ I can rescue a split mayonnaise.
- ☐ I can flavour a base mayonnaise into aioli, tartare and a dressing.
- ☐ I know how long homemade mayonnaise lasts and who shouldn't eat it.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 8 is Hollandaise: a warm emulsion with butter instead of oil, and the one that splits most easily. Eggs Benedict is the reward.

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2

Chapter 8 · Hollandaise

SKILL GOAL

Make a smooth, warm hollandaise without scrambling or splitting it, and rescue it if it does.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Hollandaise is a warm emulsion of egg yolk and melted butter, brightened with lemon. It's the same idea as mayonnaise, but the yolk is warmed, so the sauce is thicker, and a little temperamental: too hot and the egg scrambles, too cool and the butter separates.

- **Temperature is everything.** The yolks cook gently to thicken, at around 60 to 65°C. Over about 70°C they scramble. Keep the heat low, or use a bowl above, not in, simmering water.
- **Hot butter, not boiling.** The butter should be melted and hot (bubbling gently), because the heat helps cook the yolk, but let it stop sizzling before pouring.
- **Add the butter slowly,** especially at first. Pour in a thin stream while whisking or blending.
- **Serve straight away,** or keep warm in a flask or a bowl over barely warm water, for no longer than an hour. Don't reheat it.
- **Lemon at the end,** to taste. It cuts the richness.
- **Fat:** hollandaise is rich. Treat it as a special sauce, and serve a little with lots of vegetables.

BARELY COOKED EGG

Hollandaise yolks are only lightly cooked, which isn't enough to guarantee safety for everyone. Use Lion-marked eggs, and avoid serving it to anyone pregnant, elderly, very young or unwell. A shop-bought or pasteurised-yolk version is safer for them.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Blender hollandaise

10 minutes | serves 4 | rich: a treat

The blender does the whisking and the hot butter does the cooking. It's the easiest way to a good hollandaise and doesn't need hot water.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

3	medium egg yolks
1 tbsp	lemon juice
125 g	butter
Pinch	of salt and a pinch of cayenne or white pepper

1. Melt the butter in a small pan until it is hot and bubbling.
2. Put the yolks, lemon juice and seasoning in a small blender or a tall jug with a stick blender. Blend for 10 seconds.
3. With the blender running, pour in the hot butter in a thin stream. Leave behind the milky white solids at the bottom of the pan.
4. Blend until thick and pale, about 20 seconds. Taste, add more lemon or salt, and serve straight away.

> **TOO THICK?**
>
> Add a teaspoon of warm water and blend again.

LEVEL 2 · CLASSIC

Whisked hollandaise

20 minutes | serves 4 | needs attention

The traditional method. You control the heat and watch the sauce change from foam to a thick ribbon. This is where the skill is.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

3	medium egg yolks
1 tbsp	cold water
125 g	butter, melted and warm
1 tbsp	lemon juice
Pinch	of salt and a pinch of cayenne or white pepper

1. Half-fill a pan with water and bring it to a bare simmer. Put the yolks and cold water in a heatproof bowl that sits above the water without touching it.
2. Whisk constantly for 3 to 4 minutes, lifting the bowl off the heat every so often if it feels hot, until the yolks are thick, pale and leave a trail (the ribbon stage).
3. Take the bowl off the heat. Add the melted butter a few drops at a time, whisking, then in a thin stream as the sauce thickens. Leave the white solids behind.
4. Whisk in the lemon juice and seasoning. Serve at once.

> **BOWL ON AND OFF**
>
> Keep it moving, and keep lifting the bowl off the heat. If you see the edge of the yolks turning solid, take the bowl off at once and whisk in a teaspoon of cold water.

LEVEL 3 · VARIATION

Béarnaise

30 minutes | serves 4 | classic with steak

Hollandaise with a tangy herb reduction instead of lemon. Classically served with steak and roast beef.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

3 tbsp	white wine vinegar
1	shallot, finely chopped
6	black peppercorns, crushed
1 tbsp	fresh tarragon, chopped (stalks kept for the reduction)
3	medium egg yolks
125 g	butter, melted and warm
Pinch	of salt

1. Put the vinegar, shallot, peppercorns and tarragon stalks in a small pan with 2 tbsp water. Simmer until reduced to about 2 tbsp, then strain.
2. Whisk the yolks with the strained reduction over a bowl above simmering water (as in the whisked hollandaise) until thick and pale.
3. Off the heat, add the butter slowly while whisking.
4. Stir in the chopped tarragon and a pinch of salt. Serve immediately.

LEVEL 3 · THE REWARD

Eggs Benedict

25 minutes | serves 2 | a treat; lighter with spinach

A classic brunch that uses nearly every skill in the course: poaching from Eggs 1, hollandaise from here, and good timing.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	English muffins, split
4 slices	thin ham or back bacon (or a handful of wilted spinach for a lighter version)
4	very fresh medium eggs
A dash	of vinegar for the poaching water
2	medium egg yolks (for the sauce)
1 tsp	lemon juice
75 g	butter

1. Make a half-size blender hollandaise (2 yolks, the lemon juice and 75 g hot butter, as above). Keep it warm in a small bowl set over a pan of barely warm water.
2. Toast the muffin halves and warm the ham or bacon (or wilt the spinach).
3. Poach the 4 eggs together in gently simmering water with a dash of vinegar, for **3 minutes** (see Cooking Skills: Eggs 1, chapter 5).
4. Assemble: toasted muffin, ham, a poached egg, then a spoonful of hollandaise.

> **THE TIMING**
>
> Make the sauce first and keep it warm. The eggs only take 3 minutes. Do everything else beforehand, and plate while the eggs drain on kitchen paper.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Heat levels

Find the edge of scrambling.

1. Make the whisked hollandaise yolk base over three different heats: a bare simmer, a gentle simmer and a boil. Use one yolk and 1 tsp water each.
2. Whisk for the same time and note how fast each thickens or turns grainy.

Look for: On the highest heat the yolk scrambles within seconds. The gentle heat gives a smooth, thick base. That's the margin you're aiming for.

EXPERIMENT

Blender or whisk

Is the extra effort worth it?

1. Make half a batch by each method.
2. Taste them side by side while still warm.

Look for: The blender sauce is smoother and sturdier. The whisked one is lighter and a little more delicate. Many people can't tell the difference.

EXPERIMENT

Rescue a split sauce

Bring it back from the edge.

1. Overheat a small batch of hollandaise, or add the butter too fast, so it splits into a greasy, curdled mixture.
2. Try two fixes on halves: whisk in a teaspoon of cold water or an ice cube; or start a new yolk in a clean bowl and whisk the split sauce into it slowly.

Look for: Cold water often works for a mild split. The second method works for a bad split, and gives you a stable sauce again.

Tasting notes

ITEM	METHOD	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Blender hollandaise				
Whisked hollandaise				
Béarnaise				
Eggs Benedict				
Heat levels				
Blender vs whisk				
Rescued sauce				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Sauce split (oily and curdled)	Too hot, or butter added too fast	Whisk in a teaspoon of cold water, or start a fresh yolk and add the sauce slowly
Scrambled bits	Yolks overheated	Strain through a sieve, then whisk in cold water; or start again
Too thick	Too much reduction or heat	Whisk in a teaspoon of warm water
Too thin	Not enough butter, or yolks not thick enough	Cook the yolks longer before adding the butter
Tastes greasy or flat	Needs acid or salt	Add lemon juice and salt to taste
Sauce set solid while waiting	Left too long	Don't reheat it. Whisk in a spoon of warm water or make a fresh batch
Egg whites come out stringy when poaching	Eggs not fresh	Use the freshest eggs, and strain off the thin white in a sieve

FOOD SAFETY: HOLLANDAISE

Hollandaise is only lightly cooked, so use Lion eggs and make it fresh. Don't keep it for more than an hour in a warm place, and don't keep leftovers. Avoid serving it to anyone vulnerable; pasteurised yolks are an option.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make a blender hollandaise.
- ☐ I can make hollandaise by whisking over simmering water without scrambling it.
- ☐ I can rescue a split sauce.
- ☐ I can make a béarnaise.
- ☐ I can time Eggs Benedict so everything is hot at once.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2, chapter 9 is Curds, Soufflés and Putting It Together: lemon curd, a cheese soufflé and a lemon pudding, then a whole menu with a timing plan and a table of everything you have learned.

Cooking Skills: Eggs 2

Chapter 9 · Curds, Soufflés and Putting It Together

SKILL GOAL

Make a risen, rich egg dish, and plan a whole menu around your best egg recipes.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

This chapter pulls together everything from the last eight: thickening with yolks (curd), whisking whites for lift (soufflé), and baking a custard-based pudding. A soufflé has a reputation for being difficult, but it's just a thick sauce with egg yolks, folded with whisked whites. If you can make a white sauce and a meringue, you can make a soufflé.

- **Curd** is a yolk-thickened fruit mixture. It's cooked gently, stirred constantly, like a custard, and the acid in the fruit makes it tangy.
- **A soufflé base** is a thick white sauce (roux plus milk) with yolks and flavouring beaten in. It should be strongly flavoured, because the whites dilute it.
- **The whites** are whisked to firm (not dry) peaks, then one spoonful is beaten into the base to loosen it, and the rest is folded in gently.
- **Fold,** don't stir: cut down through the middle with a large metal spoon, scoop round the side and turn over. Stop when you can only just see streaks.
- **Dish prep:** grease the dish with butter in upward strokes and coat with Parmesan or sugar. This gives the mixture something to climb.
- **Bake and serve at once.** A soufflé starts to fall within minutes of leaving the oven. The guests wait for the soufflé, never the other way round.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Lemon curd

20 minutes | makes about 1 small jar | a treat: spread thinly

Gentle stirring thickens the yolks with butter and lemon. This one uses the bowl-over-water method, so it's hard to scramble.

INGREDIENTS (10 PORTIONS)

2	unwaxed lemons (zest and juice)
100 g	caster sugar
50 g	butter, cubed
2	medium eggs
1	medium egg yolk

1. Put the lemon zest and juice, sugar and butter in a heatproof bowl over a pan of barely simmering water, stirring until the butter has melted.
2. Beat the eggs and the yolk together, then strain through a sieve into the bowl.
3. Stir constantly for **10 to 12 minutes**, until the curd coats the back of a spoon. It will thicken more as it cools.
4. Pour into a clean jar, cover and cool. Keep in the fridge for up to 2 weeks.

> **USE IT**
>
> Spread on toast, spoon into the lemon meringue pots in chapter 6, swirl through yoghurt, or fill a sponge.

LEVEL 3 · CLASSIC

Cheese soufflé

50 minutes | serves 4 as a light main | a treat

The famous one. A strong-flavoured cheese sauce lightened with whisked whites.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

30 g	butter, plus extra for the dish
2 tbsp	finely grated Parmesan, for the dish
30 g	plain flour
250 ml	semi-skimmed milk
80 g	mature Cheddar, grated
1 tsp	Dijon mustard
3	medium egg yolks
4	medium egg whites
Pinch	of salt, pepper and nutmeg

1. Heat the oven to 180°C fan (200°C conventional, gas 6), with a baking tray on the middle shelf. Butter a 1.2 litre soufflé dish in upward strokes and coat with the Parmesan.
2. Melt the butter in a pan, stir in the flour and cook for 1 minute. Add the milk a little at a time, stirring, until you have a thick, smooth sauce. Simmer for 2 minutes.
3. Off the heat, beat in the cheese, mustard and seasoning, then the yolks one at a time. Cool for 5 minutes.
4. Whisk the whites to firm peaks, until they hold their shape but aren't dry and grainy. Beat a spoonful into the cheese base to loosen it.
5. Fold in the rest in two goes, gently. Pour into the dish and run your thumb round the inside rim to make a channel, which helps the soufflé rise straight.
6. Put on the hot tray and bake for **25 to 30 minutes**, until risen and golden with a slight wobble. Don't open the door before 20 minutes. Serve at once.

> **GET AHEAD**

> The cheese base (steps 1 to 3) can be made up to 3 hours in advance with a layer of cling film on top. Whisk the whites and fold at the last minute.

LEVEL 3 · PUDDING

Lemon surprise pudding

55 minutes | serves 4 | a treat; lighter with less sugar

A lighter, easier cousin of the soufflé. The whisked whites rise into a sponge layer on top while a tangy lemon custard sauce forms underneath: the 'surprise'.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

50 g	butter, softened, plus extra for the dish
100 g	caster sugar
2	lemons (zest and juice)
3	medium eggs, separated
50 g	self-raising flour
300 ml	semi-skimmed milk

1. Heat the oven to 160°C fan (180°C conventional, gas 4). Butter a 1.2 litre ovenproof dish and boil the kettle.
2. Beat the butter, sugar and lemon zest until pale. Beat in the yolks one at a time, then the flour, lemon juice and milk. It will look curdled: that's normal.
3. Whisk the whites to stiff peaks and fold into the lemon mixture.
4. Pour into the dish, stand it in a roasting tin and pour in hot water to halfway up the side.
5. Bake for **40 to 45 minutes**, until the top is golden and springy. Serve warm.

Putting it together: an egg supper for four

Pick the dishes you enjoyed most and plan a whole meal around them. This one uses a lot of what you have learned: a starter salad with a mayonnaise dressing, a soufflé and a dessert with meringue and curd. Most of it can be done in advance, and the soufflé is the only dish that has to go straight to the table.

MENU	FROM	MAKE AHEAD?
Starter: Caesar-style salad	Chapter 7	Dressing and croutons the day before. Dress the leaves at the last minute
Main: cheese soufflé with a green salad	Chapter 9	Base up to 3 hours before. Whites and baking at the last minute
Pudding: mini pavlovas with lemon curd and berries	Chapters 6 and 9	Meringue and curd 1 to 2 days before. Assemble at the last minute

Timing plan

WHEN	WHAT TO DO
The day before	Make the lemon curd and the meringue nests. Keep the nests in an airtight tin. Make the Caesar dressing and croutons.
3 hours before	Make the soufflé base, cover its surface with cling film, and leave it at room temperature. Wash and tear the salad leaves.
45 minutes before	Set the table. Take the soufflé base off to rest. Heat the oven with the tray inside. Prepare the dish.
20 minutes before	Dress and serve the starter.
While the starter is eaten	Whisk the whites, fold, fill the dish and put it in the oven. Set a timer for 25 minutes.
At the table	Serve the soufflé the moment it comes out. Dress the green salad.
Pudding	Spoon a little curd into each nest, add berries and yoghurt, and serve.

PLAN BACKWARDS

Write the time you want to eat and work back. The soufflé goes in the oven 30 minutes before the main course. Put that on a sticky note and write the others around it.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Oven door closed or opened

Learn why soufflé advice says 'don't peek'.

1. Make the cheese soufflé mixture in two ramekins, with the same mixture in each.
2. Bake both at the same temperature. Open the oven door for a few seconds after 10 minutes on one, and keep the other shut.

Look for: The door-opened soufflé is likely to have risen less or have a collapsed, uneven top. The cold air and the draught affect the delicate foam. This is a safe experiment: nothing is lost except a bit of height.

EXPERIMENT

Whisk by hand or electric

Is the whisking machine worth it?

1. Whisk two lots of 2 egg whites, one with a hand whisk and one with an electric whisk, to firm peaks. Time each.
2. Fold each into half the cheese base and bake in a ramekin.

Look for: The electric whisk is quicker and the foam is finer. The hand-whisked one is slightly less voluminous, but still rises. Hand-whisking in a copper bowl is the old way.

EXPERIMENT

Your own house menu

Pull your favourites together.

1. Look back through your tasting notes for both Eggs courses. Choose your best starter, main, and pudding.
2. Write a timing plan like the one above, work backwards from the time you want to eat and cook it for someone.

Look for: What you can do ahead, and what must be last. Use the table below to record it.

Your egg skills

SKILL	WHERE TO PRACTISE	CONFIDENT?
Boiling, frying, scrambling, poaching	Eggs 1, chapters 2 to 5	
Omelettes, baked eggs, frittata	Eggs 1, chapters 6 to 8	
Batters and pancakes	Eggs 2, chapter 1	
Stirred and baked custards	Eggs 2, chapters 2 and 3	
Quiche and savoury custards	Eggs 2, chapter 4	
Baking with eggs	Eggs 2, chapter 5	
Meringue	Eggs 2, chapter 6	
Mayonnaise and emulsions	Eggs 2, chapter 7	
Hollandaise	Eggs 2, chapter 8	
Curds and soufflés	Eggs 2, chapter 9	

Tasting notes

ITEM	METHOD	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Lemon curd				
Cheese soufflé				
Lemon surprise pudding				
Door open vs closed				
Hand vs electric whisk				
My house menu				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Soufflé sank	Door opened early, underbaked, or over-folded	Keep the door shut, bake until golden and don't over-mix
Soufflé didn't rise	Whites not whipped enough, or base too hot or stiff	Whisk to firm peaks, cool the base and loosen it first
Soufflé rose but is raw in the middle	Oven too hot, or too short	Lower the temperature slightly, and bake 5 minutes longer
Grainy whites	Overwhisked	Whisk to firm, not dry peaks. Add another white and whisk briefly if overdone
Lemon curd scrambled	Heat too high	Use a bowl over simmering water, strain, and stir constantly
Thin lemon curd	Not cooked long enough	Keep stirring over the heat until it coats the spoon
Lemon pudding has no sauce	Not baked in water, or overbaked	Use a water bath and take it out while the top is still springy

FOOD SAFETY: CURDS AND SOUFFLÉS

Cook lemon curd until it coats a spoon and keep it in the fridge for up to 2 weeks in a clean jar. A soufflé should be cooked until risen and set; a soufflé that is still liquid in the middle isn't safe for vulnerable guests. Serve within 2 hours of cooking, and throw away leftovers if they have been out all evening.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make a lemon curd that coats a spoon without scrambling.
- ☐ I can make a white-sauce soufflé base, whisk whites and fold them in.
- ☐ I know why you don't open the oven door early.
- ☐ I can plan a multi-course meal backwards from the time of serving.
- ☐ I have written down my favourite egg dishes and what I would change.

WHAT COMES NEXT

Cooking Skills continues with courses on rice, pasta, potatoes and knife skills. There will also be beginner courses on bread, ice cream and chocolate. Your egg skills carry across all of them: custards lead to ice cream, and meringue and batters lead to baking.