

Eggspanding on Benedict

World Egg Day is the second Friday in October. Why not celebrate with a truly elegant meal. When it comes to show-stopping dishes, “Eggs Benedict” is in a class of its own. Despite the fact that its components include a toasted English muffin, Canadian bacon, and rich Hollandaise sauce, it’s actually an American dish. In fact, historians give credit to a chef at the Waldorf–Astoria Hotel in New York City.

Regardless of its origin, “Eggs Benedict” has come to be synonymous with indulgence. Rich and decadent, it’s a popular choice on breakfast and brunch menus. The traditional dish was created more or less by accident, so why not use your imagination to invent your own version! The star, of course, is the poached egg. Eggs, providing top-quality protein with no carbs or trans-fatty acids, team up so well with a wide range of other ingredients that they’ve become the basis for hundreds of healthful combinations. And since poached eggs are cooked in water, they’ll provide you with needed nutrients without unwanted additional fat. But that’s not all. Eggs also deliver *eggstra* benefits, including lutein, which may prevent cataracts and age-related macular degeneration, and choline, which is essential in memory and brain development.

You’ve probably seen lots of poaching gadgets on the market, but all you really need is a saucepan and a slotted spoon. The secret to a pretty poach is to start with a very fresh egg. It will hold its shape better. Adding salt to the poaching liquid may promote coagulation and adding vinegar may lower the coagulation temperature, but neither is necessary and can flavor the egg. You might have heard that the egg should be slipped into swirling liquid. Although initially you’ll want to bring the water to a boil, it’s best to then reduce the heat to a gentle simmer. Relatively quiet water produces an egg with the nicest shape. First, break each cold egg into a custard cup or saucer. Then, holding the dish close to the surface, slip each egg into the water, removing it when the white is completely set and the yolk is beginning to thicken but is not hard. It’s that simple.

Now that you know how to *eggsecute* a perfect poach, apply some of your own fresh ideas to this tried-and-true classic. Instead of an English muffin, consider a piece of polenta or cornbread, a buttermilk biscuit, or puff pastry. For a scrumptiously innovative base, try an artichoke bottom or potato pancake. To replace the Canadian bacon, try a crab cake, smoked salmon, or slices of chicken or beef tenderloin. Or go with a layer of veggies like asparagus or mushrooms. As for the sauce, consider one that’s ready made. Any number of pasta or cheese sauces might fill the bill, or dress up a can of creamed soup.

But for celebrating World Egg Day, consider a global culinary tour. Get creative with your favorite ingredients. Give traditional benedict **an Italian flair** by layering thin slices of prosciutto on hearty chunks of focaccia. Dress up a jar of

cheese pasta sauce with a tablespoon or two of prepared pesto to spoon over the poached egg. Presto! You have a deliciously easy option for brunch or supper.

Got your imagination in gear? Consider giving the dish a **German accent**. Picture a thick slice of Black Forest ham and a poached egg perched on a slice of toasted rye bread. How can you top that? Easy, when you have a jar of Alfredo sauce on the shelf. Stir in a touch of stone-ground mustard and a handful of sharp Cheddar cheese for a rich, creamy finishing touch.

For a fabulously **French flavor**, build a tempting tower of toasted slices of French bread, crisp bacon, and nutty Swiss cheese. But this time, think out of the box. Rather than using a sauce, simply prepare a package of frozen creamed spinach to serve over the poached egg for a lusciously unique twist.

If you're **mad about Mexican**, start with oven-crisped corn tortillas. Sprinkle on some cooked, crumbled chorizo and shredded Monterey Jack cheese. Then spoon your favorite spicy salsa over the poached egg. The result? A quick-to-fix dish that couldn't be easier – and one that's sure to please the whole family.

With just a few changes in the ingredients, the traditional Eggs Benedict can take on the flavors of any country's cuisine. It's no surprise that eggs continue to be revered by cuisines around the globe. They're popular all day long - not just for breakfast, and they deserve a premier spot on your list of fast food choices. In fact, eggs have no competition for a meal-in-minutes that's affordable, versatile, and - above all - mouth-watering. Tonight, think nature's miracle food. Think eggs.