

*I love breakfast stratas, which are basically a bread pudding - bread layered with cheese and other ingredients, then a milk and egg mixture is poured over them and the dish is baked. Most versions recommend refrigerating it overnight before baking. This recipe is a little different because it uses bread cubes instead of whole slices. I probably wouldn't use kale (maybe spinach instead) and I would consider sausage instead of bacon.*



## Bacon, Cheese, and Kale Strata

### Ingredients

- 8 ounces (226g) supermarket-style French or Italian bread, or a quality white sandwich loaf, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 4 ounces (115g; about 1/2 cup) thick-cut bacon, cut into 1/2-inch strips
- 4 ounces (115g; about 3 cups) curly kale, stemmed and roughly chopped
- Diamond Crystal kosher salt
- 6 large eggs
- 1 cup (240ml) whole milk
- 1 cup (240ml) heavy cream
- 1 1/2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme, finely chopped
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1/8 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- Unsalted butter, softened, for greasing baking dish
- 4 ounces (115g; about 1 cup) shredded Gruyère cheese

### Directions

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and preheat oven to 275°F (135°C). Spread bread in an even layer on a rimmed baking sheet, and bake until completely dried, about 35 minutes, rotating baking sheet and stirring bread cubes several times during baking. Remove from oven and allow to cool.
2. In a 12-inch cast iron skillet, cook bacon over medium heat, stirring frequently, until golden and crisp, about 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer bacon to a paper towel-lined plate to drain. Drain and discard all but 1 tablespoon (15ml) bacon fat from the skillet. Add kale, season lightly with salt, and cook, stirring occasionally, until kale is wilted but still vibrant in color, about 3 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to cool.
3. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs, milk, heavy cream, Dijon, thyme, 3/4 teaspoon salt, pepper, and nutmeg until well combined. Add the dried bread and fold gently to combine. Let soak until bread is softened and slightly puffed, folding occasionally with a flexible spatula, at least 15 and no more than 30 minutes.
4. Grease an 8-inch square ceramic or anodized aluminum baking dish (see note) with butter. Using a slotted spoon, add half of the soaked bread to the prepared baking dish, spreading it in an even layer. Top with half of the kale, half of the bacon, and half of the Gruyère. Repeat with remaining bread, kale, bacon, and cheese. Pour any remaining custard over the layered strata. Using a flexible spatula, gently press down the top of the strata so that all the layers are submerged in the custard, but take care not to compress the bread. Cover tightly with aluminum foil. Allow strata to stand at room temperature for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, increase oven temperature to 325°F (160°C).
5. Bake strata until cheese is slightly melted, about 20 minutes. Remove foil, return baking dish to oven and continue to bake until strata is puffed and the center no longer jiggles when shaken, about 30 minutes. Remove from oven.
6. Adjust oven rack to 6 inches below broiler element and preheat broiler on high. Broil until surface of strata is lightly browned in spots, about 2 minutes. Transfer to heatproof surface and allow to cool for 10 minutes. Cut into portions and serve.

Before broiling the strata, please check that your baking dish is broiler-safe. Many baking dishes produced by popular brands, such as Pyrex, are not, so don't take anything for granted and please refer to the manufacturer's website for more information. Bear in mind that the timing may vary depending on the cookware involved, so pay close attention to the visual cues instead.

This recipe can be doubled and baked in a 9- by 13-inch baking dish.

## Make Ahead and Storage

Bread cubes can be dried up to 4 days in advance. Spread dried bread on a sheet pan, cover loosely with aluminum foil, and store at room temperature.

The cooked bacon and kale can be refrigerated separately in airtight containers for up to 4 days.

After covering the uncooked strata with foil, it can be refrigerated overnight. When ready to bake, remove the strata from the refrigerator and let sit at room temperature for 1 hour; this will help the strata bake more evenly.

Leftovers can be stored in the baking dish covered with foil and refrigerated for up to 5 days. Reheat in the microwave in 45-second intervals.

To freeze, wrap individual portions tightly in plastic, transfer to a resealable freezer bag, and store in the freezer for up to 3 months. Allow to thaw in the refrigerator overnight before reheating.

