

A different way to cook eggs, very easy and simple.

— AMERICA'S —
TEST KITCHEN

Coddled Eggs

SERVES Serves 2

TIME 25 minutes

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS



Coddling is, by definition, one of the gentlest ways to cook an egg. You crack one or two into a greased ramekin or cup and then nestle the ramekin into a simmering water bath on the stove and cover the pot. The ramekin's walls insulate the egg, and the hot water from below and steam from above efficiently but softly set the white and thicken the yolk so that it's just a notch tighter than runny. To ensure consistent results, we started with two fridge-cold eggs per 3-inch-wide ramekin. Using cold eggs reduced any textural contrast; a pair of them in a relatively small ramekin ensured that they “stacked” on one another, encouraging the whites to further insulate the yolks. We also used a relatively deep lidded pot; its ample headspace wouldn't fill with steam too quickly, which would cause the eggs to cook faster from the top than from the bottom. A double layer of paper towels on the floor of the pot helped anchor the ramekins during cooking. To ensure uniform cooking from top to bottom—and keep our hands out of harm's way—we added the filled ramekins to the pot and poured boiling water around them; that way, the water instantly cooled when it hit the pan, giving the eggs a gentler start to cooking. Then we turned the burner to medium to bring the water up to a simmer. Salting the bottom of the ramekin as well as the eggs before cooking seasoned every bite; incorporating other additions—crumbled cheese or bacon, sautéed or roasted vegetables, flavored butter, chili crisp, fresh herbs, and citrus zest—made for endless flavor variations.

INGREDIENTS

4 large eggs, cold from refrigerator

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

***** Use a large saucepan with high sides and a tight-fitting lid. The diameter of the ramekin impacts the cooking time; use ramekins that are 3 to 3¼ inches wide at their base. The eggs will

- 4 pinches table salt, divided
- 2 teaspoons unsalted butter
- minced fresh tarragon or dill (optional)

continue to cook off the heat, so serve them promptly. Instead of herbs, you can top the eggs with your favorite compound butter, Sichuan chili crisp, grated cheese, or crumbled bacon.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Spray two 4-ounce ramekins with vegetable oil spray. Sprinkle bottom of each ramekin with pinch of salt. Crack 2 eggs into each ramekin and sprinkle eggs with pinch of salt. Line bottom of large saucepan with thin dish towel or double layer of paper towels, folding to fit in bottom of pan. Place filled ramekins on top of towels. Bring kettle of water to boil. Pour boiling water into pot, avoiding ramekins, until it comes halfway up sides of ramekins (about 1 inch deep).

2 Cover pot and cook over medium heat until egg whites are just set and opaque and yolks are pale yellow and covered by thin film, 9 to 10 minutes. (If after 2 minutes, no steam is escaping from beneath lid, increase heat until steam is visible.) Using tongs, grasp ramekin and shake gently; center should jiggle slightly. If eggs slosh rather than jiggle, continue to cook, covered, checking every 30 seconds.

3 Remove pot from heat. Using tongs and sturdy, thin spatula, transfer ramekins to cutting board. Gently blot top of eggs with paper towel to remove any condensation. Top each portion with 1 teaspoon butter and herbs, if using. Season with salt and pepper to taste, and serve immediately.

Want to Scale Up?

As long as you have enough ramekins and lidded pots, it's easy to coddle enough eggs to serve a party. A large saucepan plus a Dutch oven can hold up to 9 servings; add another Dutch oven, and you could make 15 servings.

The Ultragentle Nature of Coddling

With the right setup and method, coddling insulates eggs from direct heat and encourages particularly even cooking.

The Setup

- 1. Water Bath:** Efficiently conducts heat to the sides and bottom portion of the eggs.
- 2. Deep Lidded Saucepan:** Creates ample headspace for trapped steam to fill the pot gradually, so the eggs don't cook faster from the top than from the bottom.
- 3. Ramekin:** Insulates the eggs from direct heat; small diameter also encourages the eggs to “stack” on one another so that the whites surround and protect the yolks from overcooking.
- 4. Paper Towels:** Prevent the ramekins from skittering noisily around the pan.
- 5. Fridge-Cold Eggs:** Eliminate any textural contrast for consistent results.

The Method

The usual method for coddling eggs is to place them into a pot of simmering water, where they steam until set. We add the filled ramekins to the pot and then pour boiling water around them. The water cools when it hits the pan, giving the eggs a slightly gentler start to cooking that ensures that the outer portions of the white don't overcook, but is still hot enough to encourage a temperature differential between the white and yolk.