



Eggs Benedict

Contrary to popular belief, Eggs Benedict did not originate in the Vatican, it is actually American, with various claims to having produced the original. The most popular being that Lemuel Benedict, a Wall Street stock broker, had wandered into the Waldorf Hotel, New York in 1894 and, hoping to find a cure for his morning hangover, ordered "buttered toast, poached eggs, crisp bacon, and a hooker of hollandaise". Oscar Tschirky, the maître d'hôtel, was so impressed with the dish that he put it on the breakfast and luncheon menus but substituted ham for the bacon and a toasted English muffin for the toast.

Whoever, whatever, it is a fantastic Breakfast or Brunch dish, and whilst you can buy English Muffins and Hollandaise Sauce (fresh or dried mix), let's make it all from scratch.

English Muffins

- 300g strong white bread flour, plus extra for flouring
- 7g packet fast-action yeast
- ½ tsp salt
- 15g caster sugar
- 15g softened butter, cut into small pieces
- 1 medium free-range egg lightly beaten
- 170ml milk
- oil, for greasing
- 15g semolina or polenta, plus extra for dusting

1. Tip the flour into a large mixing bowl. Sprinkle the yeast on one side of the flour and the salt into the other. Add the sugar, butter, egg and milk, then mix all the ingredients together to form a soft dough.
2. Turn out onto a lightly floured surface and knead for 10 minutes, or until soft, smooth and stretchy.
3. Lightly grease a large bowl with oil. Place the dough in the oiled bowl, cover and leave to prove for about one hour, or until doubled in size.
4. Dust the work surface with a mixture of the semolina/polenta and flour. Tip the dough out onto the work surface and roll out to about 2.5cm thick. Makes 8.
5. Lightly dust two baking trays with half of the semolina or polenta.

6. Using a 9cm straight-sided cutter (I use a pint glass), cut out eight muffins. Place four muffins, evenly spaced apart on each of the dusted baking trays and dust the remaining semolina or polenta over the top of the muffins.
7. Leave to prove for another 30 minutes.
8. Preheat the hot plate or a heavy-based frying pan on the hob to a low/medium heat. Test one first. Griddle for approximately 5-6 minutes, then flip over and griddle for another 6-7 minutes on the other side. If too dark, turn the heat down.
9. Leave to cool, they toast better from cold.

Hollandaise Sauce

- 2 large egg yolks
- 150g butter, cold and cut into cubes
- Juice of ½ a lemon
- Pinch of salt

1. Place the egg yolks in a large heatproof bowl over a pan of gently simmering water.
2. Whisk the yolks and slowly add the cubed butter, bit by bit. After each bit melts, whisk continuously until it is combined and the sauce has thickened.
3. Add the lemon juice and a pinch of salt and stir through.
4. Turn off the heat, but keep the sauce warm over the pan of water.

Assemble!

You can use either bacon, ham or smoked ham. If ham I usually heat it up a little.

1. For 2 people, split 2 muffins and toast the inside only.
2. Cook 4 poached eggs in gently simmering water for about 3-4 minutes, so yolk is still runny but the white is perfectly set. Remove from the water and place on kitchen paper to dry.
3. Butter the toasted side of the muffins, place two or three slices of ham/bacon on them, then a poached egg and top with about two tablespoon of Hollandaise sauce.
4. Garnish with black pepper and some finely snipped chives, or try a sprinkle of paprika.

Brunch is served.

National Eggs Benedict Day was April 16th and over the years numerous variations have evolved. The most popular being:

- Eggs Blackstone adds streaky bacon and a tomato slice.
- Eggs Blanchard adds Béchamel sauce for Hollandaise.
- Eggs Florentine adds spinach.
- Eggs Mornay substitutes cheese sauce for the Hollandaise.
- Eggs Omar adds a small steak, and sometimes replaces the Hollandaise with Béarnaise.
- Eggs Royale adds salmon, which may be smoked.
- Huevos Benedictos adds sliced avocado and/or Mexican chorizo, and is topped with both a salsa (such as salsa roja or salsa brava) and Hollandaise sauce.
- Irish Benedict adds corned beef.
- California Eggs Benedict adds sliced Hass avocado. Variations include adding sliced tomato.
- Easter Eggs Benedict substitutes a Cadbury chocolate egg for the egg, chocolate sauce for the Hollandaise and chocolate cake for the muffin !!