

How to Poach an Egg: Traditional & Easy Method

Poaching works best with gently simmering water rather than a hard boil. The traditional swirl method creates a compact shape, while the easier no-swirl method removes one of the trickier steps for beginners.

What You Need

- Large eggs, as fresh as practical
- Optional: 1 tbsp white vinegar per quart of water
- Slotted spoon
- Water, enough for about 2–3 inches in the pan
- Small bowl or ramekin
- Fine-mesh strainer for the easy method

How to Do It

Fill a saucepan or skillet with about 2–3 inches of water and bring it to a gentle simmer. You want small bubbles, not a rolling boil. Add vinegar if using.

Traditional Swirl



1. Crack one egg into a small bowl.
2. Stir the water gently in one direction to create a mild whirlpool, then slide the egg into the center.
3. Poach about 3–4 minutes, until the white is set but the yolk is still soft.
4. Lift with a slotted spoon and let excess water drain.

Easy No-Swirl



1. Crack the egg into a fine-mesh strainer over a bowl and let the very loose white drain for a few seconds.
2. Transfer the egg to a small bowl.
3. Slide the strained egg gently into barely simmering water without swirling.
4. Poach about 3–4 minutes, until the white is set and the yolk is as soft as you prefer.

For more than one egg, use the no-swirl method and leave enough space between eggs so the whites do not merge. Avoid overcrowding the pan.

Remove each egg with a slotted spoon, drain briefly, season and serve. For a firmer yolk, add cooking time in small increments.

Jane’s Note

A hard boil can tear the whites apart, so keep the water gentle. Fresher eggs generally hold a tighter shape. Vinegar is optional; it can help the white set but too much can affect flavor. If serving someone at higher risk from foodborne illness, use pasteurized eggs or cook until the yolk is fully set.

Storage

Poached eggs are best served immediately. If necessary, fully cooked poached eggs can be chilled promptly and reheated gently in hot water.

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