



MICROWAVE MINUTES

By JOYCE BATTCHER

While Easter eggs are pretty to look at, unfortunately, they may not be the first choice for eating. The same holds true for the holiday ham. The rich aroma while the ham roasts is enticing, but after the big dinner or the first ham sandwich, interest seems to wane.

Your microwave oven can come to the rescue to make Easter eggs and ham seem less like leftovers and more like "new" foods.

Let's take eggs, for example. A hard-cooked egg can be heated for a quick breakfast. One caution: don't heat it whole or it will explode. Peel and slice the egg into a custard cup or a dessert dish. If you wish, top with a bit of butter, salt, and pepper. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave on High 15 seconds. If not warm, add another 15 seconds. Don't heat too long, or butter and eggs will "pop."

Cut hard-cooked eggs into thick slices and add them to just about any kind of casserole. For casseroles made of cooked ingredients that just need heating, add eggs at the beginning. For long-cooking casseroles that start with raw ingredients, gently stir in egg slices after cooking, but before standing time.

Slice a hard-cooked egg onto a buttered, toasted English muffin. Top with well-drained cooked vegetables — green beans, broccoli, or asparagus are especially good — and a slice of cheese. Put on muffin top; wrap in a paper towel and microwave on Medium

until it feels warm and the cheese barely starts to melt.

Or you might try Eggs Deluxe On Broccoli (below). Conveniently-made microwave white sauce, enhanced with mushrooms, celery, and herbs, is combined with sliced hard-cooked eggs. Mushrooms, celery, and herbs are microwave first to soften the vegetables and flavor the sauce. Flour is added and cooked 30 seconds to remove the starchy taste, and the milk gradually stirred in. Then cooking time is short, stirring is every two minutes, and, best of all, there's no sticky pan to scrub.

If you're on a strict cholesterol-reducing diet, you certainly can use only the egg whites in any of these recipes, but don't throw the yolks away. Hard-cooked yolks are special treats for birds or will add essential fats and nutrients to your dog's or cat's diet.

Now on to ham. A warm ham sandwich is much better than a cold one. Make your usual ham sandwich on a lightly-buttered crusty roll, toasted English muffin, toasted hamburger roll, or toasted firm-type whole wheat bread; but leave out the lettuce. The sandwich will heat faster if you layer on several thin slices of ham, rather than use one thick slice. Wrap the sandwich in a paper towel and microwave on Medium until sandwich feels barely warm.

Don't overheat, or bread will be tough and rubbery. Time is about

45 to 60 seconds on Medium (50 percent power, 325-350 watts) for 1 sandwich, or about 3 to 4 minutes on Medium for 4 sandwiches.

Slices of cooked ham can be heated for a quick meal. Layer ham in a microwave-safe flat dish, platter, or dinner plate. Arrange slices in a ring shape with center open, putting thicker slices towards outside edges of dish. If desired, sprinkle lightly with cooking juices or orange or apple juice. Cover with waxed paper. Microwave on Medium, allowing 1-1/2 to 2 minutes for 1 serving (about pound) or about 5 to 6 minutes for 4 servings. Heating time depends on thickness and amount per serving, but be cautious about microwaving too long or slices will dry out.

Cubes of ham can be added to your favorite casserole. For a quick-cooking casserole, add ham right away. For a longer-cooking casserole, add it towards end of cooking. Ham is also excellent, either with eggs or alone, in Eggs Deluxe On Broccoli (below).

Spanish Ham and Pepper Combo (below) is a new recipe for using cooked ham. It has a delightfully spicy flavor and inviting appearance; best of all, it is easy to make and fast to cook. Peppers, onions, and garlic are pre-cooked in a covered casserole to soften. Olive oil is called for, mostly for flavor and to add richness. It could be reduced or even omitted for fewer calories because

the vegetables can be softened just by microwaving them tightly covered. Other ingredients are added to the same dish and microwaved until hot. Served on rice, pasta, or potatoes, this is a delightful "new" ham main dish.

Eggs Deluxe On Broccoli

- 1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
 - 1/2 cup celery
 - 2 tablespoons margarine or butter
 - 1/4 teaspoon dill weed
 - 1/4 teaspoon dried basil
 - 1/4 teaspoon pepper
 - 3 tablespoons flour
 - 1-1/4 cups milk
 - 4 hard-cooked eggs, sliced
- Cooked, drained fresh or frozen broccoli spears

Place mushrooms, celery, margarine, dill weed, basil, and pepper in microwave-safe 2-quart casserole. Cover with lid or plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 2-1/2 to 3-1/2 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Stir in flour until smooth. Re-cover and microwave (High) 30 seconds. Gradually stir in milk, mixing with whisk until smooth. Microwave (High) 4-1/2 to 5 minutes, stirring after each 2 minutes, or until boiling and thick. Stir in eggs. Microwave (High) 2 to 3 minutes or until hot. Spoon over cooked, drained broccoli spears. Makes 4 servings.

Each serving: 223 calories, 12g protein, 14g fat, 13g carbohydrate, 215 mg sodium, 257 mg cholesterol.

Variation: Serve over toasted bread, pastry shells, or cooked rice or pasta. If desired, substitute 2

cups cubed cooked ham for eggs. Or use part ham and part eggs.

Spanish Ham and Pepper Combo

- 2 large bell peppers, cut into strips
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 tablespoons olive or vegetable oil
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 can (16 ounces) peeled tomatoes in juice
- 1 to 1-1/2 pounds cooked ham, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 2 tablespoons dry vermouth
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 teaspoons sweet Hungarian paprika or 1 teaspoon regular paprika
- Dash cayenne pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper

Place bell peppers, onions, oil, and garlic in microwave-safe 2-quart casserole. Cover with lid or plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 2 to 5 minutes, depending on desired doneness. Break up tomatoes and add, along with juice. Add ham, vermouth, bay leaves, paprika, cayenne, and black pepper. Re-cover and microwave (High) 8 to 9 minutes, stirring once, or until hot. Serve in shallow soup bowls over rice, pasta, or potatoes. Makes 6 servings.

Hint: This is even better when made ahead and reheated. If not serving immediately, cool, then cover tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate.

Each serving — without rice, pasta, or potatoes: 167 calories, 14g protein, 12g fat, 6g carbohydrate, 887mg sodium, 32mg cholesterol.

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