

# MICROWAVE MINUTES

By **JOYCE BATTCHER**

Do you like your eggs well cooked? I hope so, because that's the recommended safe way — whether eggs are cooked in your microwave or in a skillet.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture says there may be some risk in eating eggs lightly cooked — including soft-cooked, soft scrambled, or sunny side up. Recommendations from it, and other health experts, are to cook eggs thoroughly until both the yolk and white are firm, not runny.

This warning comes because of outbreaks of food-borne illness caused by *Salmonella enteritidis* bacteria. Scientists believe the bacteria can go directly from infected laying hens into eggs before the shells are formed.

There's no danger in eating eggs, as long as the eggs are cooked well-done. The bacteria are killed when eggs are cooked thoroughly.

Be especially careful if you are elderly, chronically ill or pregnant. Your risk of becoming seriously ill from a food-borne illness is greater than the general population's. However, lower-risk peo-

ple react differently to food bacteria. Some people will show no signs of illness and others can become seriously ill. So why take a chance?

Besides cooking eggs thoroughly, realize that lightly cooked foods containing eggs may also be risky. These include soft custard, soft meringue, chilled mousse and French toast. Avoid eating these homemade foods if they're made with eggs: mayonnaise, Caesar salad dressing, Hollandaise sauce, ice cream and eggnog. (Store-bought products and varieties made with pasteurized egg products are safe.) Use refrigerated grade AA or A eggs with clean, uncracked shells, and keep eggs refrigerated.

If you have questions about using eggs safely, call the USDA's toll-free Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-800-535-4555. In Washington D.C. area, call (202) 447-3333. Hotline hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. EDT.

I strongly recommend cooking eggs thoroughly, but I also know the results of overcooking eggs. To microwave eggs to the well-

done stage, yet prevent tough and rubbery-tasting eggs, use the following guidelines.

Don't microwave eggs too long and do allow standing time. Microwave the least amount of time given in a recipe. Then stir or lift edges and look at the eggs. If they're almost cooked — just slightly soft — stop microwaving. Let them stand, tightly covered, for a few minutes to finish cooking. Before serving, look again. Gently stir or lift edges. If the yolk and/or white are still runny, recover the dish and microwave on a lower power setting, 30 seconds for each one to two eggs. With a clean utensil, stir or lift edges to make sure the eggs are thoroughly cooked.

Use a lower power setting. This allows eggs to cook slower and more evenly. Medium (50 percent power, 325-350 watts) or Medium Low (30 percent power, about 200 watts) are most often used. Scrambled and poached eggs are often cooked on High. However, if you have problems getting them well-done and tender, try using a lower power setting.

During cooking, cover eggs tightly with plastic wrap or a tight-fitting lid. Stir scrambled eggs — and even omelets — at least once during cooking. Large amounts of scrambled eggs need more frequent stirring. Omelets using more than two large eggs are not recommended because it's difficult to get the center completely done without toughening the edges.

The easiest eggs to microwave to the well-done stage without toughening are scrambled eggs. A

small omelet is a little trickier to keep from toughening, but it can be done. Try the two recipes below to practice microwaving safe, perfectly cooked eggs.

## Scrambled Egg Boats

2 small (about 3x4-inch crusty French rolls)  
Margarine or butter (room temperature)  
Garlic powder or garlic salt  
2 large whole eggs  
4 egg whites (or 2 additional whole eggs)  
¼ cup low-fat milk  
¼ teaspoon dried thyme or summer savory  
¼ teaspoon salt (optional)  
Dash pepper  
1 can (4 ounces) mushrooms, well drained  
½ cup chopped, cooked, low-salt, low-fat cooked ham or cooked shrimp  
½ cup shredded Cheddar cheese  
Cut rolls in half, lengthwise; scoop out centers, leaving a half-inch shell or "boat." Cut centers into cubes and set aside. Lightly spread rolls with margarine and sprinkle with garlic powder; set aside.

With a fork or whisk, mix whole eggs and egg whites in a microwave-safe 1-quart measure or deep dish. Stir in milk, seasonings and bread cubes. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave on Medium (50 percent power, 325-350 watts) 3 to 5 minutes or until puffy. Stir well, recover, and microwave (Medium) 1 to 1½ minutes or until eggs are almost cooked. Stir in mushrooms and ham, recover, and microwave (Medium) 1 to 2 minutes or until hot. Let stand, covered, about 2 minutes. Stir well; if eggs are still runny, microwave (Medium) 1 to 2 minutes or until set. Drain off any accumulated liquid. Spoon eggs into rolls. Set rolls on a microwave-safe plate; sprinkle each with cheese. Microwave (Medium) 1 to 1½ minutes or until cheese barely

starts to melt. Serve hot. Makes 4 sandwiches.

Each sandwich: 253 calories, 18g protein, 13g fat, 18g carbohydrate, 658mg sodium, 152mg cholesterol.

## Vegetable Omelet

1 teaspoon margarine or butter  
2 large eggs  
2 tablespoons water  
Dash onion powder  
Dash dried oregano leaves  
Dash salt and pepper (optional)  
1 cup frozen mixed vegetable blend  
1 tablespoon water  
1 teaspoon grated Parmesan cheese

Use a 6- to 7-inch diameter round casserole or reusable microwave dinner plate or a microwave-safe 8-inch pie plate. Melt butter in plate by microwaving (High) 20 to 30 seconds. Spread butter over plate bottom. Mix eggs, 2 tablespoons water, and seasonings until blended; pour into plate. Cover tightly with plastic wrap. Microwave on Medium (50 percent power, 325-350 watts) 2 minutes. Gently stir cooked edges to center; smooth mixture and re-cover. Continue microwaving (Medium) 2 to 3 minutes, rotating plate after each 1 minute. Omelet is done when center is set, but still *slightly* moist. Let stand, covered, 1 to 2 minutes to finish cooking.

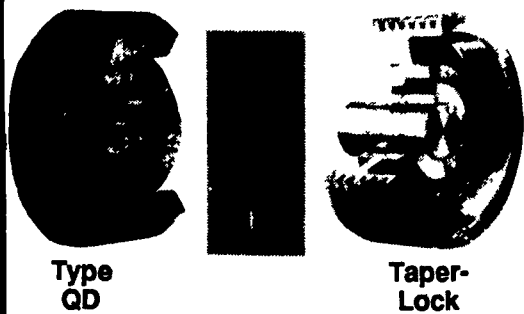
Meanwhile, place vegetables and 1 tablespoon water in a microwave-safe small dish; cover with plastic wrap. Microwave (High) 2 to 3 minutes or until hot. Drain well. Spoon evenly over omelet. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. With pancake turner, fold omelet in half. Slide onto serving plate. Makes 1 to 2 servings.

Each serving — ½ of recipe: 121 calories, 7g protein, 9g fat, 3g carbohydrate, 99mg sodium, 252mg cholesterol.

Hint: For more servings, make additional omelets or make scrambled eggs and add hot cooked vegetables after cooking.

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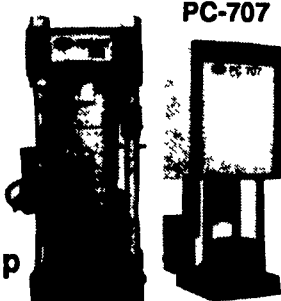
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