

Cooking Methods Made Simple

Clear techniques without assuming prior knowledge

Recipes often use short words such as **boil**, **simmer**, **sauté** or **roast** as though everyone automatically knows what they mean. If nobody has shown you the method, that single word can stop the whole task. This guide turns common cooking methods into visible actions, signs to look for and basic safety checks.

Cooking confidence is learned, not something people are simply born with. You are allowed to use one appliance, ready-prepared ingredients, timers, visual instructions and the same familiar method repeatedly.

The safest method is one you understand, can monitor and have enough capacity to complete.

Always follow the packaging and appliance instructions for the exact food being cooked. Times vary with size, quantity, starting temperature and equipment. This guide explains methods but cannot provide one universal cooking time.

Methods at a glance

Method	What it means	How you recognise it	Useful for
Boil	Cook in liquid hot enough to bubble strongly.	Large bubbles rise and break continuously.	Pasta, potatoes, eggs and vegetables where appropriate.
Simmer	Cook gently in hot liquid below a full boil.	Small, steady bubbles; less movement and steam.	Soup, sauces, stews and foods needing gentler heat.
Steam	Cook with steam above hot water, not submerged.	Water boils below; food sits in basket with lid on.	Vegetables, fish or dumplings when instructions suit.
Bake	Cook with dry heat in an enclosed oven.	Food sits in a dish or tray at a set temperature.	Bread, cakes, pasta bakes and prepared dishes.
Roast	Cook uncovered with dry oven heat, often to brown.	Surface becomes browned or crisp while inside cooks.	Vegetables, potatoes and suitable meat.
Grill	Cook with strong direct heat, usually from above.	Surface browns quickly and needs close watching.	Toast, cheese toppings and thin suitable foods.
Sauté	Cook small pieces quickly in a little fat.	Food sizzles gently and is moved regularly.	Vegetables and small pieces where suitable.
Microwave	Heat using microwave energy in a suitable container.	Food heats rapidly; standing and stirring may be required.	Ready meals, reheating and packet foods.

Boiling and simmering step by step

1 Choose a pan large enough that liquid will not easily spill over. **2** Add the amount of water or liquid the recipe states. **3** Place the pan securely on the hob with the handle turned away from the edge. **4** Heat until you see the required bubble pattern. **5** Add food carefully to avoid splashes. **6** Adjust the heat: strong continuous bubbles for boiling; small steady bubbles for simmering. **7** Use a timer. **8** Turn off the heat before draining. Use oven gloves and keep your face and hands away from steam.

Common confusion

If this happens	What it may mean	Possible response
Water climbs up the pan	Heat is too high or pan too full.	Reduce heat carefully; never leave a boiling pan unattended.
Nothing is bubbling	Liquid may not be hot enough.	Increase heat gradually while staying nearby.
Simmer becomes a rolling boil	Heat has risen too far.	Lower the setting until only small steady bubbles remain.

Steaming made visible

Water belongs below the basket and should not normally touch the food. Bring water to the required heat, place food in the basket, cover with a lid and maintain enough water that the pan does not boil dry. Open the lid away from your face because steam can cause burns. Check doneness using a trusted recipe or packet instruction.

Oven methods: baking and roasting

Preheat means turn the oven on and allow it to reach the stated temperature before the food goes in, unless the instructions say otherwise. Put the shelf in position before the oven becomes hot. Use an ovenproof dish or tray, set a timer, and use dry oven gloves. Open the door while standing slightly back. Hot glass or ceramic dishes should go onto a heat-safe surface, not a cold or wet one that could cause thermal shock.

Baking usually aims for even cooking; roasting often aims for browning. The words describe the intended result more than completely different equipment. Fan ovens may require a different setting, so follow the recipe and your appliance guide.

Grilling safely

Grills use intense direct heat. Position the food at the stated distance, keep the grill pan stable and remain close. Turn food when directed using suitable utensils. Fat can spit and some foods can burn rapidly. Never line or cover parts of the grill unless the manufacturer permits it. Turn the grill off as soon as cooking is complete.

Frying and sautéing

Use a stable pan and only the amount of oil stated. Heat gradually; food should sizzle rather than produce heavy smoke. Add wet food carefully because water can make hot oil spit. Keep handles away from the edge, stay with the pan and move food with a suitable utensil. If oil smokes heavily, turn off the heat if safe. Never pour water onto an oil or fat fire; get out, stay out and call 999.

Microwave cooking and reheating

Use microwave-safe containers and vent lids as directed. Pierce foods only when the packaging tells you to. Follow the wattage, time, stirring and standing instructions. Stirring and standing help heat spread more evenly. Be careful when lifting film or lids because steam

escapes suddenly. Food requiring reheating should be steaming hot throughout where appropriate, but follow the product label and medical guidance.

Air frying

An air fryer is a small fan oven. Do not overfill the basket or block air circulation. Follow the appliance and product instructions rather than copying oven times without adjustment. Place the appliance on a stable heat-resistant surface with ventilation around it. The basket and escaping air become very hot.

Sensory and executive-function adaptations

Barrier	Adaptation
Noise	Use ear protection; choose microwave or oven rather than loud frying; silence non-essential alerts.
Smell	Open a window, use the extractor, choose covered methods or ask another person to cook.
Heat and steam	Use longer utensils, stand back when opening, allow cooling time and ask for help with draining.
Touching food	Use tongs, gloves, pre-cut ingredients, baking paper or pour-from-pack options.
Sequencing	Write one action per line; place equipment in order; tick each step; use separate timers.
Time blindness	Stay in the kitchen when required; label timers with the food name; avoid starting another demanding task.
Uncertainty	Repeat a familiar method, photograph the result and record the exact pan, setting and time that worked.

Choosing the lowest-demand method

Capacity	Method to consider	Reduce the task
Very low	No-cook or a labelled ready meal.	One container, one timer, familiar food.
Low	Toaster, kettle or microwave where suitable.	Use pre-portioned ingredients and packet directions.
Moderate	One-pan simmer, air fryer or one-tray oven food.	Prepare everything before switching on heat.
More available	A method requiring turning, draining or several timings.	Prepare an extra portion only if it does not add pressure.

My cooking-method cheat sheet

The method I feel safest using: _____

The appliance setting that worked: _____

The pan, tray or container: _____

What the food looked, sounded or felt like when ready: _____

The timer I used: _____

Sensory support that helped: _____

The step I want help with: _____

A message from Maggie

Not knowing a cooking word does not mean you are incapable. Many instructions leave out the knowledge that somebody once had to teach. You are allowed to ask what a word means, use pictures, repeat one method and keep the steps beside you.

Choose the safest manageable route for the capacity you have. Using a microwave, ready-prepared ingredients or another person's help is not taking a shortcut from "real" cooking. It is making food accessible.

Sources and books

Food Standards Agency. UK information on cooking food safely, chilling, reheating, hygiene and allergens.

[food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene](https://www.food.gov.uk/safety-hygiene)

NHS Eatwell Guide. General guidance on food groups and overall balance.

[nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/)

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents. Home and kitchen safety information.

[rospa.com](https://www.rospa.com)

How to Cook Everything The Basics by Mark Bittman - illustrated explanations of basic techniques.

Delia's Complete How to Cook by Delia Smith - detailed foundations and methods.

Cook As You Are by Ruby Tandoh - flexible cooking for different energy, equipment and experience.

Clinical and safety note

This guide cannot determine whether a particular food is cooked safely. Use current packaging, trusted recipe instructions and an appropriate food thermometer where recommended. People with allergies, swallowing difficulties, pregnancy-related restrictions, medical diets or reduced immunity may need specific professional advice.

Space to Breathe Therapy | Bodmin, Cornwall
spacetobreathethe.com