

Fish and Chip Recipe

Most of us will nip down to the local chippie to buy our fish and chips but you may like to cook them at home, hot and fresh from the fryer. You can also try out different flavoured batters or even change the types of fish. Here's my recipe for you to try.

Batter

Making a good batter is probably what most people find a challenge but obtaining the right thickness and consistency is vital to protect your fish and ensure its quality taste.

Ingredients:

1 medium sized cod fillet per person

100g (4oz) plain flour

100g (4oz) self raising flour

5ml (1/2 tsp) salt

280ml (1/2 pt) milk or a dark beer

15ml (1 tbsp) of oil

2 stiffly beaten egg whites

1 egg yolk

Water

Salt and vinegar to finish.

You will also need:

A deep fat fryer

Groundnut oil

Instructions:

Sift the flours and a pinch of salt into a basin. Make a well and add the egg yolk (keep the egg whites for the next step) and liquid and beat the mixture together until it's smooth. Leave the batter to rest for 30 minutes. You can add a little cold sparkling water to your rested batter to give it a lighter finish.

Meanwhile, whisk the egg whites until they are light and fluffy. Fold them into the rested batter mix and you are ready to go.

If you like, you can use beer in your batter instead of milk as it can give it a bit more flavour as well as more bubbles for a lighter covering. Dark beers such as Guinness work well.

Alan's tips

Add a small pinch of salt to the egg whites before starting to whisk, this will increase the speed in which they become firm. An egg white will also whisk

quicker if it is at room temperature. For testing that your eggs are whisked to the right consistency try turning it upside down. If it's ready, it won't fall out.

If you find that your batter is a bit too thick then thin it down with a small amount of milk, until it coats the back of a spoon.

Cooking the Fish:

Coat the fish lightly in seasoned flour. When ready, carefully hold the fish at the tail end and dip it into the batter. Use the side of a bowl to wipe the battered fish lightly to remove any excess.

The fat temperature in the fryer should be pre-heated to 180°C and the wire basket should be removed. Gently place the fish away from you into the oil to avoid splashes with the hot fat. The fish should rise to the surface after 3-4 minutes and may need turning with a perforated spoon to ensure an even browning and crispy texture. After another 3-4 minutes the fish should be ready.

Fish science

The perfect batter...

The combination of flours is good for batter. The self-raising flour contains raising agents, mostly bicarbonate of soda and tartaric acid, which start to produce little bubbles of carbon dioxide gas, once some liquid is added. The bubbles keep the batter light and fluffy. But you also want the batter to be able to hold together and keep the fish wrapped up. That's where the plain flour comes in. It has a high proportion of protein, in addition to the starch. The proteins interact to form gluten - long, tangled strands of molecules which effectively glue your batter together so it nicely wraps around the fish.

Liquid reaction...

When you add the liquids, the reactions are all kicked off. The raising agents in the self-raising flour start to produce the tiny bubbles and the proteins in the plain flour begin to absorb water. As water is absorbed, the protein molecules start to escape and get tangled up together - which thickens the whole thing. When you leave the batter to rest in the fridge, more protein molecules escape, allowing more entanglement and making the batter even thicker. You'll notice the difference, and may need to add milk to thin it back down afterwards.

A healthy choice...

If the fish has been properly covered with a good batter, it shouldn't come into contact with the hot oil at all, as it's protected by the batter. The hot oil comes into contact with the batter rather than the fish, which produces steam and this effectively 'poaches' the fish inside it. A bonus is that the vitamins are locked in by the protective layer of batter, whereas when you boil or fry the fish they can just leak out. So the fish inside the batter is actually really good for you.

Chips

Cooked potatoes, golden and crisp sounds easy to do, but can cause so many problems. Getting the right technique is all important in achieving the perfect chip.

Ingredients

Allow 2 medium sized potatoes per person, preferably Maris Piper, washed and peeled
Ground nut oil for cooking

Instructions

Cut the potatoes into slices about 1cm (1/2in) thick, and 5cm (2ins) long. And then cut the slices into strips 5 x 1 x 1cm (2 x 1/2 x 1/2ins). Wash them well and dry them with a cloth.

Place them into the basket, and lower them carefully into the deep fat at 165°C. I find the best way to cook chips is by doing it in two stages so once the potato chip has softened and become "limp", drain it thoroughly trying not to shake the basket and damage the chips. Put them aside on a plate. When required for eating simply place the chips back into a basket. Increase the fat temperature to 180-185°C and lower the chips into the fat carefully. Cook them until they are crisp and golden then drain them well, season with salt and they're ready to eat.

Alan's tip

You can make chips the day before you require them simply by taking them through the first cooking process. Store them covered in the refrigerator, and when ready to eat simply return them to the deep fat fryer to crispen off, colour and reheat. But I do recommend that you remove the chips from the fridge and leave for 30 minutes to help come back to room temperature.

The chip science

The right potatoes

Maris Piper or King Edwards are the best to use for chips because they're both very starchy. Avoid waxy potatoes, like Desireés, as they contain quite a lot of water. Too much moisture makes chips go soggy, so stick to starchy spuds.

Chunky chips

The size of chip you use is important too. Imagine a large chip, which soaks up some oil through each of its different surfaces. If you cut it in two, it will soak up more oil, as you have increased the surfaces that will be contact with the oil. So bigger chips mean you end up eating less oil.

Cooking them through

The catch with bigger chips though is that you run the risk of not cooking them properly. But you're safe with Alan's method of cooking the chips twice. The first time you cook them, at the lower temperature of 165°C, you can make sure that whatever the thickness, they are cooked through. At this temperature, you won't get too much browning on the outside and you are not likely to burn the chip. Whacking them in at a higher temperature afterwards, say 185°C, gets the browning reactions going on the outside of the chip, so that's when all the tasty, golden crispiness develops.

Low fat chips!

When you come to cook the chip, it may look like the oil is boiling. But actually, the only thing that's boiling is the water in the chip. And as water in the chip boils away, the escaping steam creates a protective layer around the chips, which stops oil from being absorbed. Just like with the fish, it's as if the chips are being poached by all the steam. It's when you take the chips out that the oil on the surface of the chips seeps back in through the tiny pores that the escaping steam left behind. So, if you quickly pat dry your chips with kitchen paper as soon as you take them out of the oil, you reduce the total amount of oil you eat.

And as an accompaniment ...

Mushy Peas...

A favourite accompaniment to fish and chips, mushy peas are dried marrowfat peas soaked and then boiled.