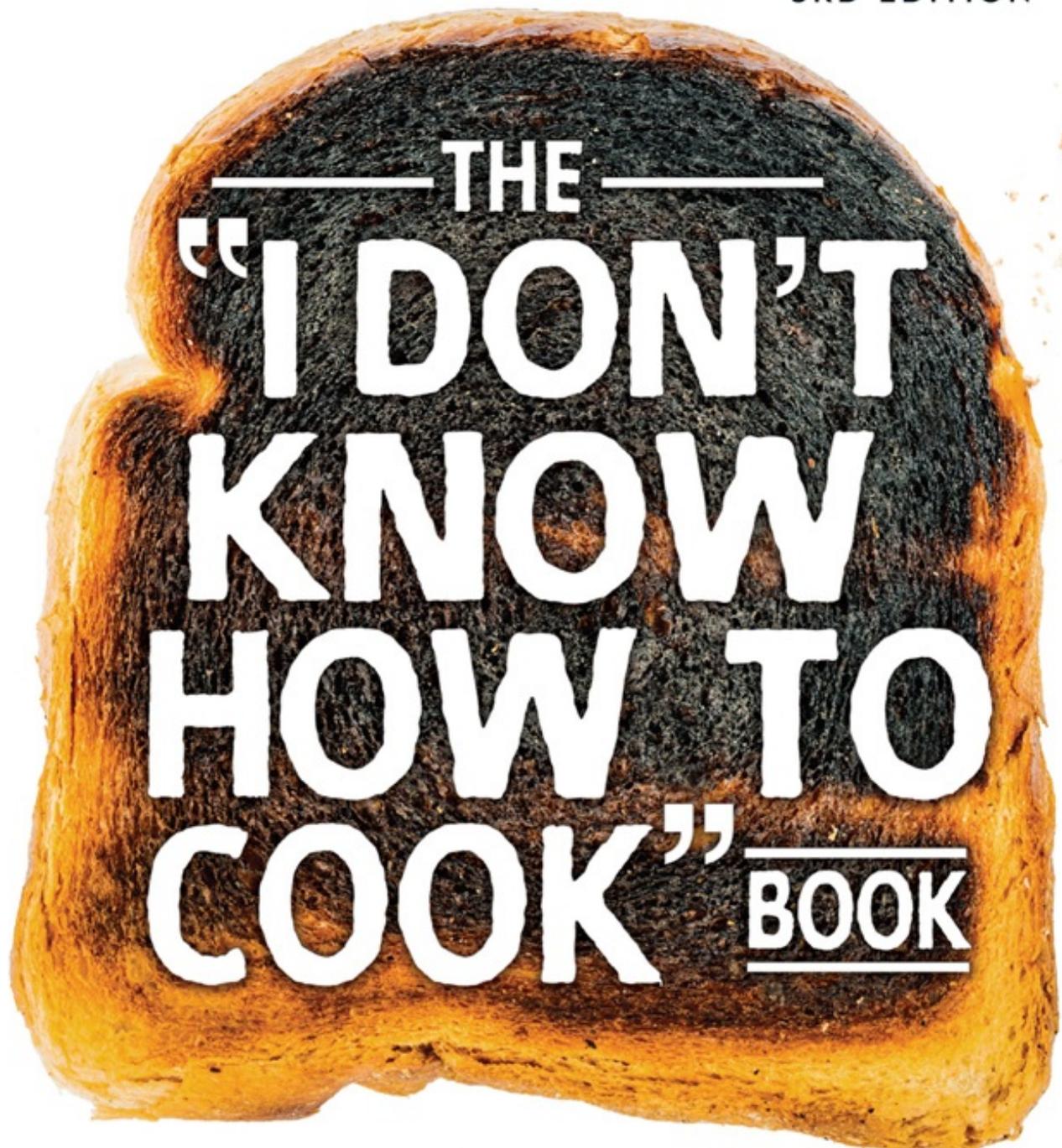


3RD EDITION



— THE —
“I DON’T
KNOW
HOW TO
COOK” BOOK

300 GREAT RECIPES

You Can't Mess Up!

MARY-LANE KAMBERG

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 **adams**media
Avon, Massachusetts

For my daughters, Rebekka and Johanna

My gratitude to the Kansas City Writers Group

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Introduction



Welcome to the kitchen! If you like to eat but think you can't cook, this book is for you. If you can read, you can make these dishes. Simply follow the easy directions.

The "I Don't Know How to Cook" Book is not a "teaching" workbook. The instructions don't use any fancy cooking terms that might scare you away. (You can look them up in the Glossary of Cooking Terms in Appendix B if you need to understand traditional cookbooks.) Instead, you'll create the dishes you want to eat without taking a cooking class.

For this third edition I focused on one question: If I couldn't cook but wanted to learn, which common foods could I try with the highest chance for success? I wanted to provide recipes so tasty and easy to make that new cooks would enjoy positive cooking experiences. The biggest change in this edition is the emphasis on healthy dishes. I tried to give new cooks something different to do with fruits and vegetables rather than just eating them plain. You'll find such new dishes as Watermelon-Raspberry Salad, Avocado-Cucumber Salad, Peas with Mint Butter, and Garlic Green Beans with Pecans.

But you'll find that I didn't ignore snacks and sweets. In [Chapter 10: Snacks and Appetizers](#), you'll find delicious recipes for Popcorn and Fresh Tomato Salsa that belong in everyone's repertoire. In [Chapter 11: Desserts](#), I included new recipes for such standards as Toll House Cookies, Lemon Bars, and Carrot Cake (with Cream Cheese Frosting), along with No-Bake Cheesecake and the best cookies in the world: Oatmeal Chocolate Chip. The cinnamon in this recipe makes these cookies irresistible!

In some cases I replaced old recipes with better ones. For example, Salmon Patties is gone, and Salmon-Potato Patties with Lemon-Basil Sauce stands in its place. Likewise, Beef Stroganoff replaced the less exciting Beef and Noodles from the second edition. I added some standard items like Pancakes the Old-Fashioned Way, Biscuits and Sausage Gravy, Baked Ham, Baked Beans, and Pan-Fried Chicken that should have been in earlier editions but were somehow overlooked. In [Chapter 3: Soups and Stews](#) you'll find the old standards Ham and Beans and French Onion Soup, along with the new and tasty Cheeseburger Soup with an unusual texture provided by shredded lettuce. (It's really good!)

Moving on from the basics, you'll find some fancy (but still easy!) recipes for French Toast Casserole, Layered Spinach Salad, Apple-Glazed Pork Chops, and Gorgonzola and Sage-Stuffed Chicken Breasts, to name a few. In short, there's enough variety in this new edition to make *The "I Don't Know How to Cook" Book* the only cookbook you'll need to get started in the kitchen.

All recipes in this cookbook—even those marked "hard"—were chosen because they're easy to make. The "hard" ones might use less common ingredients or take more steps than those marked

“easy” or “medium.” Trust me, they’re still easy! The dishes are grouped according to difficulty within each chapter and are identified by these symbols:

Easy: **E**

Medium: **M**

Hard: **H**

LEVEL **E**

SERVINGS **4**

In addition, vegetarian recipes are identified with “**v**” after the recipe title.

Try the recipes marked “easy” first to ease into the cooking game. After that, challenge yourself with those marked “medium” and “hard.” You’ll gain cooking skills while you build your recipe stockpile, along with your confidence. I hope that after you succeed with some of these dishes, you’ll venture out on your own culinary journey.

Enjoy!

Recipe for New Cooks



1. Before you begin, read the recipe all the way through. Assemble all ingredients. (The ingredients in *The “I Don’t Know How to Cook” Book* are listed in the order of their appearance in the directions. If you like order, you can line them up in a row—but you don’t have to!)
2. Always wash your hands before and after handling food, especially raw meats and poultry, which may contain harmful bacteria that proper cooking kills.
3. Ovens and microwaves vary, so many recipes give a range of cooking times. In recipes that give a range of cooking times, such as 15 to 20 minutes, check the food after the first time listed. If the dish is not done, return to the heat source for the additional time.
4. No recipe is carved in stone. After you try a recipe for the first time, make notes to yourself in the cookbook’s margin. Note cooking times for your oven or microwave, as well as measurements you would like to adjust to your personal taste.
5. Sometimes you’ll want to prepare fewer or more servings of a recipe. All you have to do is a little math. You can double a recipe by multiplying the measurement of each ingredient by two. You can cut a recipe in half by dividing the measurement of each ingredient by two. But be careful. Cooking times may vary—especially in microwaves that need more time to cook larger quantities of food. If you’re doubling a recipe, do *not* double the cooking time. Cook it according to directions, but be aware that you may need a little more cooking time. The reverse may be true when cooking smaller amounts.
6. Plan menus. Eat different types of foods so you get a variety of nutrients. If you’re new to meal planning, follow the school lunch menu, which often appears in local papers. Qualified dietitians plan the menus. Do what they do.
7. Nothing will dampen your enthusiasm for cooking more than a kitchen full of dirty pots, pans, and utensils when the food is done. Whenever possible, clean as you go. When you are finished with a pot, measuring cup, or mixing bowl, wash it while you’re waiting for noodles to boil or during baking times. You can let the cooking utensils drip dry, or, if you’re really a neat freak, you can dry them and put them away. (Nah!)

Bon Appétit!

What Are Some Common Measurements?

These common measurements will help you when using this cookbook and any other!

3 teaspoons = 1 tablespoon

4 tablespoons = $\frac{1}{4}$ cup

5 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon = $\frac{1}{16}$ cup

1 cup = $\frac{1}{2}$ pint

2 cups = 1 pint

2 pints = 1 quart

2 quarts = $\frac{1}{2}$ gallon

4 quarts = 1 gallon

CHAPTER 1

Breakfasts and Breads



Breakfasts

Easy

Orange-Banana Smoothie

Poached Egg

Makin' Bacon

Fried Egg

Variation: Fried Egg and Cheese

Boiled Egg

Scrambled Eggs

Chili Egg Puff

Apple Oatmeal

Pancakes the Old-Fashioned Way

Variation: Baked Apple (or Blueberry) and Sausage Pancakes

Variation: Baked Nutty Banana Pancakes

French Toast

Honey-Banana Bagel Spread

Peaches and Cream Bagel Spread

Strawberry Bagel Spread

Honey Butter

Medium

Huevos Rancheros

Poppy Seed Ham Biscuits

Biscuits and Sausage Gravy

Roasted Breakfast Potatoes

Home-Fried Potatoes

Hard

Sausage Soufflé

Breakfast Burrito

Quiche Lorraine

Mushroom Quiche

Bacon and Egg Casserole

Egg Pizza

French Toast Casserole

Breads

Easy

Orange-Glazed Biscuits

Easy Coffee Cake

Biscuits

Corn Bread

Medium

Blueberry Muffins

Mexican Corn Bread

Spinach Bread

Hard

Pumpkin-Nut Bread

Banana Bread

Easy Dinner Rolls

ORANGE-BANANA SMOOTHIE v

LEVEL E

SERVINGS 4

Wake up to this delicious breakfast in a glass, and get ready for a great day! Bananas are known to calm the mind and oranges are said to clear the mind. You'll be prepared to take on the world in just a few minutes. Use an electric blender or electric mixer.

What You Need:

- 1 banana
- 1 (6-ounce) can frozen orange juice concentrate
- 6 ounces water (use the orange juice can to measure)
- Ice, as needed (about 2 cups)

What You Do:

1. Peel and slice banana. Place the orange juice, water, and banana in an electric blender. Blend until smooth.
2. Place ice in serving glasses. Pour the mixture over the ice.

POACHED EGG v

LEVEL E

SERVINGS 4

Poached eggs are cooked in steam. You can make them in a frying pan that has a lid, or you'll need a poaching pan, an electric egg poacher, or a microwave egg poacher.

Poached eggs are especially good served on toast, with a somewhat runny yolk soaking into the bread. Yum.

What You Need:

About 1 teaspoon butter, margarine, vegetable oil, or nonstick cooking spray

1 egg

Water

What You Do:

1. Place the butter, margarine, or vegetable oil in a frying pan or spray with nonstick cooking spray. Heat the pan over medium heat until the shortening melts. (If using cooking spray, heat the pan for about 30 seconds.)
2. Break the egg into the pan. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon water (for each egg). Cover tightly.
3. Cook for about 5 minutes or until the egg is as firm as you like.

MAKIN' BACON

LEVEL E

There's nothing like the sound and smell of bacon sizzling in the pan to start your day. Bacon is a favorite with eggs, pancakes, and French Toast (see recipe in this chapter). You can also use cooked bacon in tossed salads and on sandwiches.

Method 1: Pan-Fried

1. One at a time, lay strips of bacon side by side in a cold frying pan. Turn on heat to medium-high. As the bacon cooks, use a fork to move the slices often to avoid sticking. When each slice is brown on the first side, use a fork or tongs to turn it over.
2. Cook on the second side until the bacon is as crisp as you like it. Use a fork or tongs to remove each slice from the pan. Drain on several sheets of paper towels.

Method 2: Microwaved

1. Place 2 pieces of paper towels on a microwave-safe plate. Place strips of bacon on the paper towels in a single layer. Cover with another 2 pieces of paper towels.
2. Microwave on high for 4 to 6 minutes. Keep an eye on it. Check after 5 minutes and again every minutes until done.

Method 3: Baked

Preheat oven to 400°F. Separate pieces of bacon and lay across the rack of a broiler pan. The slots in the broiler pan lid will let bacon fat drip into the lower part of the pan. If you don't have a broiler pan, use a shallow, ovenproof baking dish. Bake on a middle oven rack for about 10 minutes. No need to turn.

What Should I Do with the Bacon Fat?

Bacon fat is often used to add flavor to eggs, vegetables, or other foods. After cooking bacon, pour the fat into an ovenproof glass container. (The fat will be hot and could crack containers not designed to hold hot food.) Cool to room temperature. Cover and store in refrigerator until ready to use. If you don't plan to use it to add flavor to other foods, do not pour it down the sink. You'll clog your drain pipes. Instead, pour it into a used can, chill in refrigerator until solid, and discard.

LEVEL E

SERVINGS 1

All you need to fry an egg is a frying pan—or a hot sidewalk—and some type of fat, like butter, margarine, vegetable oil, or nonstick cooking spray. For added flavor, use saved bacon grease or the drippings from freshly cooked breakfast sausage.

What You Need:

2–3 tablespoons butter, margarine, vegetable oil, or nonstick cooking spray

1 egg

What You Do:

1. Melt the butter (or alternative) in a frying pan over medium heat. When melted, crack the egg into the frying pan.
2. For “sunny-side up,” cook until the yolk is done according to your preference. For “over easy,” let cook until the white is almost done. Flip with a spatula. Immediately flip over onto serving plate. “Basted” eggs look like “over easy” eggs, but you don’t flip them over. Instead, as the egg cooks, spoon hot fat from the frying pan on top of the egg. The top will cook, but you won’t risk breaking the yolk during the flipping process.

LEVEL **E**

SERVINGS **1**

When the egg white is cooked, or immediately after flipping over the egg, add a slice of your favorite cheese. Cook until the cheese melts.

BOILED EGG V

LEVEL E

SERVINGS 1

Both soft-boiled and hard-boiled eggs are cooked the same way. The only difference is the cooking time. Start with an egg at room temperature.

What You Need:

1 egg

Water, as needed to cover the egg

What You Do:

1. Place the egg in a saucepan (for many eggs at once you can use a Dutch oven, but don't stack eggs on top of each other). Cover with water. Bring to a boil over medium-high to high heat.
2. When the water boils, cover tightly. Remove from heat. For a soft-boiled egg, let stand for 2 to 4 minutes, depending on your preferred firmness. For a hard-boiled egg, let stand for 20 minutes.
3. Rinse the egg in cold water to stop the cooking process and to make it easier to remove the shell.

How Do I Boil Water?

Boiling water means heating it enough that it turns to steam. All you do is pour the water into a saucepan or microwave-safe dish and heat over high heat on the stovetop or on high in a microwave until big bubbles break on the surface. Boiling water is an important cooking method used for cooking eggs, hot dogs, vegetables, and even some meat.

Water boils faster if you cover the pan with a lid. Be careful not to let the pan boil dry. As water boils, it evaporates as steam. So if you heat it too long, all the water will disappear and your food will burn.

SCRAMBLED EGGS v

LEVEL E

SERVINGS 2

You can eat scrambled eggs alone or with cheese or other added ingredients, such as chopped bell pepper, chopped onion (or dried onion flakes), sliced olives, sliced mushrooms, bacon bits, diced cooked ham, or crumbled cooked sausage. You can use any type of milk from skim to whole. However, using water instead of milk makes the eggs fluffier.

What You Need:

- 1–2 tablespoons butter, margarine, vegetable oil, nonstick cooking spray, or bacon fat
- 2–3 eggs
- 2–3 tablespoons milk or water

What You Do:

1. Melt butter (or alternative) in a frying pan (any size) over medium heat. (If using butter, don't let it turn dark brown. Reduce heat if necessary.)
2. Crack the eggs into a small mixing bowl. Add 1 tablespoon milk for each egg. Quickly stir with a fork to break the yolks and blend in the milk. Add any optional ingredients. Pour into frying pan.
3. As the eggs cook, stir so they heat evenly for about 5 to 6 minutes. When the eggs are still a bit runnier than you like, remove from heat and let sit for 1 to 2 minutes. (Eggs will continue to cook.) Fluff with a fork.

CHILI EGG PUFF v

LEVEL E

SERVINGS 8

Add a taste of Mexico to breakfast or brunch. You can mix the ingredients ahead of time and slip this dish into the oven when your guests arrive.

What You Need:

- 1 tablespoon solid shortening, for greasing the pan
- ½ cup butter
- 10 eggs
- 3 cups shredded Monterey jack cheese
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 pint cottage cheese
- 2 (4-ounce) cans diced green chilies

What You Do:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Use the solid shortening to generously grease a 9" × 15" ovenproof baking pan. Melt the butter in a small frying pan or saucepan over low heat. Crack the eggs into a large mixing bowl. Beat until smooth and yellow.
2. Stir in the cheese, flour, baking powder, and cottage cheese. Beat again until well mixed.
3. Drain the chilies. Mix into the egg mixture by gently stirring the mixture from bottom to top.
4. Pour mixture into the baking pan. Bake for 35 minutes or until the mixture is puffy and no longer runny.

LEVEL E

SERVINGS 4

This is not your mother's oatmeal. With the fragrant aroma of apples and cinnamon, this oatmeal has the zing and spice of apple pie. Serve with cold milk to drink and/or stir into the cereal. Enjoy.

What You Need:

- 1 apple
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup oats (uncooked oatmeal—not instant)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup raisins (optional)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cinnamon
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup milk
- About 2 tablespoons loosely packed brown sugar

What You Do:

1. Peel, core, and chop the apple. Place in a saucepan with the oats, raisins, and cinnamon. Stir in the milk and cook over medium heat until bubbly. Reduce heat to low. Simmer for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Spoon into 4 serving bowls. Sprinkle each with about $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons brown sugar.

How Do I Use an Apple Corer?

If you like apples, you'll love a kitchen gadget called a corer. A corer is a circular tool with a round space in the middle and pie-shaped holes around the circle. The metal edges are sharp on the bottom side. To use, first rinse apple under cold, running water. Pat dry with a paper towel. Place apple on a cutting board, stem-side up. Place the circle of the corer over the stem. Push down in a single thrust. Lift tool. Apple slices will fall away, and the core will be removed.

LEVEL E

SERVINGS 6

You don't need a pancake mix for this all-you-can-eat breakfast. Double or triple the recipe if you need more than a dozen pancakes. For variety add 1 cup rinsed blueberries to the batter. Serve with butter and your favorite flavor of syrup or jam.

What You Need:

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup milk
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil, plus 1–2 tablespoons for cooking, divided

What You Do:

1. Place the flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt in a medium mixing bowl. Stir until well mixed. Set aside.
2. Crack the egg into a large mixing bowl. Add the milk and 2 tablespoons of the oil. Quickly stir with a fork until well blended. Add the flour mixture. Gently stir until the batter is well mixed but still a little lumpy.
3. Place the remaining vegetable oil in a large frying pan or griddle. Use a paper towel to spread the oil to coat the entire surface. Heat over medium heat until a few drops of water sprinkled on the pan lightly dance on the surface.
4. For each pancake pour ¼ cup of the batter onto the frying pan. Cook for about 2 to 3 minutes until the edges look a bit hardened, the bubbles that form on the top of the pancake start to pop, and the bottom of the pancake is golden brown. The appearance of the pancake is more important than a specific cooking time. Use a spatula to flip to the other side for another 1 to 2 minutes, until golden brown.
5. Cook the remaining batter until it is all used up. Add more oil to the pan as needed to prevent batter from sticking.

6. Optional: Serve as you go. Or, store the cooked pancakes on an ovenproof platter in a 200°F preheated oven until all the batter is used.

How Can I Sweeten Foods?

You can sweeten foods with corn syrup, honey, maple syrup, or molasses. But the most common sweetener used in home cooking is sugar. Sugar most commonly comes from sugar cane or sugar beet. However, some commercial sugars derive from sorghum, maple, or palm. The three types of sugar most often used in cooking are granulated sugar, brown sugar, and confectioners' sugar. Granulated sugar is the sugar you're used to seeing in a sugar bowl. Brown sugar is a mixture of granulated sugar and molasses. Brown sugar comes in light and dark varieties. Confectioners' sugar, also called powdered sugar, is fine granulated sugar mixed with cornstarch. Its texture resembles flour. When cooking, use the type of sugar the recipe specifies. Do not try to interchange them.

VARIATION: BAKED APPLE (OR BLUEBERRY) AND SAUSAGE PANCAKES

LEVEL E

SERVINGS 6

Use the batter for Pancakes the Old-Fashioned Way (see recipe in this chapter) to make a sweet, baked breakfast dish. You can substitute $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of fresh blueberries for the apples. Serve warm with butter and maple syrup or confectioners' sugar.

What You Need:

- 1 tablespoon solid shortening or nonstick cooking spray, for greasing the pan
- $\frac{1}{2}$ (12-ounce) package medium or hot spicy ground pork sausage
- Batter for Pancakes the Old-Fashioned Way (see recipe in this chapter)
- 1 apple
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons cinnamon
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons granulated sugar

What You Do:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Use the solid shortening to grease an 8" × 8" ovenproof baking pan or generously spray with nonstick cooking spray.
2. Brown the sausage in a large frying pan over medium-high heat. Drain off fat. Place in a large mixing bowl, stir in the pancake batter, and pour into the baking pan.
3. Peel, core, and slice the apple. Layer the slices on top of the batter. Sprinkle lightly with the cinnamon and sugar. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until puffy on the edges and golden brown on top. Cut it into squares and remove from pan with a spatula. Serve warm.

LEVEL **E**

SERVINGS **6**

If you feel like a nut—or a monkey—try this. Serve warm, with butter and maple syrup or confectioners' sugar.

What You Need:

1 tablespoon solid shortening or nonstick cooking spray, for greasing the pan

Batter for Pancakes the Old-Fashioned Way (see recipe in this chapter)

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 tablespoons chopped pecans

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt

1 banana

What You Do:

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Use the solid shortening to grease an 8" × 8" ovenproof baking pan or generously spray with nonstick cooking spray.
2. In a large mixing bowl stir together the pancake batter, cinnamon, vanilla extract, pecans, and salt. Pour the batter into the baking pan. Peel the banana, slice crosswise, and arrange in a layer on top of the batter. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until puffy on the edges and golden brown on top. Cut it into squares and remove from pan with a spatula.

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