



Soft Pretzels (Bicarbonate of Soda Method)

This recipe makes soft pretzels with a golden-brown, chewy crust and a soft, fluffy interior. Using bicarbonate of soda (baking soda) for the alkaline bath creates a similar flavour and texture to traditional lye pretzels, but with a safer and more accessible ingredient.

Prep Time: 90 mins, **Cook Time:** 15 mins, **Makes:** 8

Ingredients

For the dough:

- 500g strong white bread flour
- 1 tbsp caster sugar
- 2 tsp fine sea salt
- 7g sachet fast-action dried yeast (or 2 tsp)
- 300ml warm water (around 40°C)
- 30g unsalted butter, melted

For the bicarbonate bath:

- 1 litre water
- 60g bicarbonate of soda

For finishing:

- 1 egg yolk + 1 tbsp milk (for egg wash)
- Coarse sea salt or pretzel salt
- Optional: poppy seeds, or grated cheese for topping

Method:

1. Make the dough:

- In a large bowl, mix the flour, sugar, salt, and yeast together.
- Gradually add the warm water and melted butter. Mix until a dough forms.
- Knead on a lightly floured surface for 8–10 minutes until smooth and elastic.
- Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with a damp tea towel, and let it rise in a warm place for 1 hour or until doubled in size.

2. Preheat and prepare:

- Preheat your oven to 220°C (200°C fan) / 425°F / Gas 7.
- Line two large baking trays with baking parchment or silicone mats.

3. Shape the pretzels:

- Turn the risen dough onto a clean surface and divide it into 8 equal pieces.
- Roll each piece into a 50cm rope.
- To shape:
 - Form the rope into a U-shape.
 - Cross the ends over each other twice.
 - Fold the twisted ends down over the base of the U, pressing them lightly into the dough to create the classic pretzel shape.

4. Bicarbonate bath:

- In a large saucepan, bring the water and bicarbonate of soda to a boil.
- Reduce the heat to a simmer.
- Carefully drop each pretzel into the solution, one at a time, for 30 seconds.
- Use a slotted spoon to remove them and place them on the prepared trays.

5. Finishing touches:

- Brush each pretzel with the egg yolk and milk mixture for a glossy finish.
- Sprinkle generously with coarse sea salt or your chosen toppings.

6. Bake:

- Bake in the preheated oven for 12–15 minutes, until deep golden brown.
- Transfer to a wire rack and let them cool slightly before serving.

Serving suggestions:

- Enjoy warm with mustard, cheese dip, or butter.
- For a sweet version, brush with melted butter after baking and dust with cinnamon sugar.