

digestive biscuits

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Digestive Biscuits

A wholemeal, semi-sweet biscuit invented in Scotland in 1839 and named for the baking soda in it, which was thought to aid digestion. The claim was never sound — the name is not permitted on packaging in the United States for exactly that reason — but the biscuit is a genuinely useful piece of engineering: coarse enough to have flavour, dry enough to keep, and structurally the base of half the cheesecakes in Britain.

What makes it work

- **Coarse wholemeal, not fine.** The bran flecks are the texture. A fine wholemeal flour gives a biscuit that tastes wholemeal but eats like a plain one. See [flour](#) and [Wheat](#).
- **Oatmeal in the mix, medium grind.** Traditional recipes are part wheat, part oat; the oat is what gives the sandy, slightly gritty break. See [oats](#).
- **Very little liquid.** Two tablespoons of milk, no more. This is a short, crumbly dough that must be pressed rather than kneaded.
- **Dock every biscuit.** The fork holes let steam out; without them they dome and then crack.
- **Bake dry.** 18 minutes at 170 °C, and then leave them on the tray. A digestive that bends is underbaked.

Ingredients

Makes about 24.

- 150 g coarse wholemeal flour
- 100 g medium [oatmeal](#), or rolled oats blitzed coarse
- 75 g all-purpose flour
- 100 g unsalted butter, cold and cubed
- 75 g light brown sugar
- 5 g baking powder
- 3 g baking soda
- 4 g fine salt
- 2–3 tbsp [milk](#)

Optional chocolate coating: 200 g dark or milk chocolate — see [Chocolates](#)

Method

Rub the butter into the flours, oatmeal, sugar, leavenings and salt until it looks like coarse breadcrumbs. Add the milk a spoonful at a time and press the mixture together — it should just cohere, and no more.

Roll between parchment to 5 mm and cut 7 cm rounds. Prick each three or four times with a fork.

Bake **170 °C / 340 °F for 16–18 minutes**, until evenly sand-coloured. Cool on the tray; they crisp entirely as they cool.

For chocolate digestives, temper or simply melt the chocolate, spread a spoonful on the flat underside of each cooled biscuit, and draw a fork across it in waves. Set chocolate-side up.

Notes

- **The chocolate goes on the bottom.** This is not a whim: the factory dips them upside down, and the wavy pattern is the underside of the biscuit as it sat in the mould. Everyone eats them chocolate-side down.
- Crushed digestives plus melted butter, 200 g to 100 g, is the standard cheesecake base — see [new york cheesecake](#).
- **Keeps three weeks** in a tin. Humidity is the only enemy.

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