



HOW TO TELL WHEN A CAKE IS DONE CHEAT SHEET

THE TOOTHPICK TEST

- Many recipes will tell you the cake is done when you insert a toothpick and it comes out clean. I don't really agree with that...at least not completely. In my experience, the toothpick doesn't need to come out clean...it just shouldn't come out with raw batter on it. It's ok if it has a few crumbs on it.
- A lot of times, if you wait and keep baking it until it comes out clean, it'll be baked too long and can be dry. In my experience, a few crumbs showing up on your toothpick, is actually a good thing. That means it's still moist. This is especially true for vanilla cakes that can easily be over-baked and dry out on you.
- That's not to say that if your toothpick comes out completely clean that your cake will be dry. It doesn't work that way. Again, each recipe is different. What I'm trying to say is that it's okay when there are a few crumbs left on your toothpick and sometimes continuing to bake until nothing at all shows up is really over-baking your cake.

THE SIDES PULL AWAY

- The next way to tell is when the sides of the cake pull away from the pan a bit. Of course you don't want them to shrink in a ton, but you'll notice when they start pulling away a bit from the sides.

YOU GET A GOLDEN BROWN COLOR

- Another way to tell is by the color of your cake. This is particularly true of vanilla cakes. They'll usually turn a nice golden brown. They'll start turning this color before they're done, so you don't want to use this as your only test for cake doneness, but it's a good place to start. For chocolate cakes, you can see the change in texture, but obviously you can't really see them becoming golden in color.



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IT BOUNCES BACK WITH LIGHT TOUCH (SOMETIMES)

- The next tip is that the top of the cake will bounce back with a light touch, or it will at least not feel 'jiggly'.
- If you lightly touch the top and it just dents in and feels a little wobbly, then you know it probably needs a little more baking time.
- You want to be careful with this one though. If you're right in the middle of your baking time, you don't want to go pressing on the top of the cake. You could cause it to fall. This is something you'll want to do close to the end of your baking time. For example, if the recipe says bake for 40-45 minutes, then you could do it at say 38 minutes or so.
- This won't work the same on every single type of cake. Depending on the cake recipe, it's done when you lightly press the top and it sort of bounces back. Don't be fooled though, sometimes it's done when it dents in just a little, but it doesn't have that wobbly or jiggly feeling to it.
- Now, when I'm testing a recipe and I open the oven door, I can tell immediately if the middle of the cake is a little jiggly. I know right then that it's not done, so I'm not going to try and test it. Just shut the door carefully and add some more time to your timer if that happens.

YOU CAN TELL BY THE SCENT

- The next tip is for those who have been baking for awhile, or those who have extra sensitive sniffers. If you have a really good sense of smell, you can just about tell it's close by the smell.
- Open the oven a crack and take a whiff. For me I can tell you when it's almost done, or when I've over-baked it just a tad. This takes a little practice and it's a little different with each recipe, but you get to know your recipes and when it smells done.



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MY METHOD (WHAT WORKS BEST FOR ME & HOPEFULLY HELPS YOU TOO)

- So here's usually what I do when checking for doneness: First I open the door slightly to look in. I can smell that it needs a little more time and I can see that when I opened the door, the very middle might have jiggled just a tiny bit. I can also see that it doesn't look quite as golden as it normally does (if it's a vanilla cake) and I know I need to give it a little more time, so I slowly and carefully close the oven door.
- When I go to recheck it later, I slowly open the oven door a bit and take a look to see if it seems jiggly. I look at the sides to see if they've started to look firmed up and pulling away from the edges of the pan slightly. I also look at the color to see if it's getting close. I touch the top to see how it feels and if I feel like it's just about ready, I'll do the toothpick test (with the cake still in the oven).
- (All that is done in a matter of seconds (or maximum, a minute) because you don't want to be standing there with the oven door open for long.)
- So when I do the toothpick test, if it comes out with any batter, I let it bake a few more minutes and test again.
- If the toothpick comes out this time with a few crumbs, then I take it out of the oven. So this whole time, I've left it in the oven. You don't want to be taking your cakes in and out of the oven to test them. That messes with the oven temperature too much and that could also cause your cakes to fall.
- I only take them out when I'm sure they're done. Once I take them out and set them on the cooling racks, I lean over and smell them. I can get a good idea then if my cakes will be perfect, or if they've been over-baked a bit. I know that sounds weird, but I'm not the only one who does this...I stopped feeling weird when I noticed people on the Great British Baking Show doing it too.
- Some of these tips seem a little wishy-washy, but there's not just one specific way to tell if a cake is done. Learn to use some or all of these tips and maybe through the process, you'll even figure out your own style.