

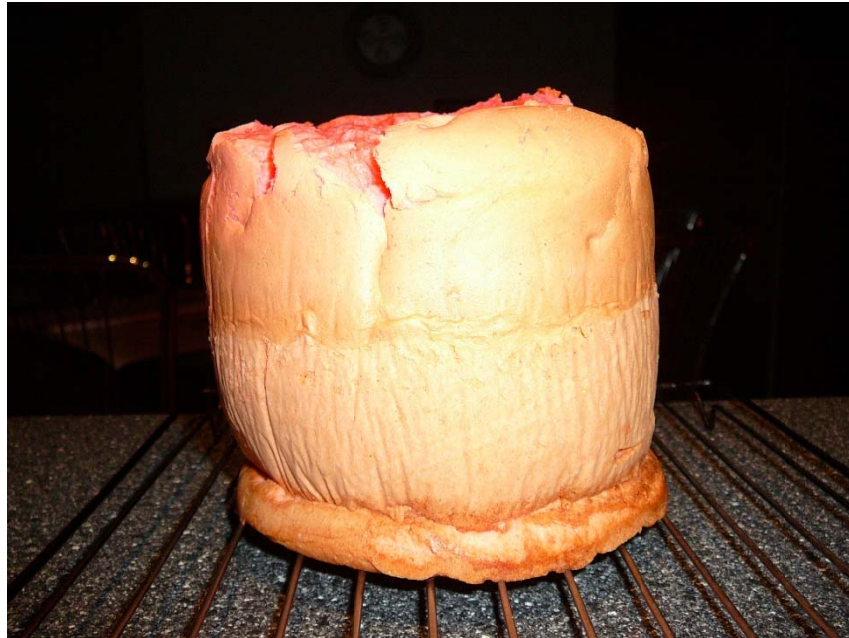
A GUIDE TO WHAT WENT WRONG WITH MY CAKE!

Is your cake just not doing what you want it to do?

Has it not cooked properly?

Is it just a little bit too dry?

Has it sagged in the middle?



Ooops my first disaster – oven too hot, too much mixture and pan too small!! Lesson learned.

The cake pictured above was my first disaster and I thought I had worked it all out as I had not had any further failures for quite a while – however, having recently made a vanilla cake which looked perfect as it left the oven but not so great when it collapsed / shrunk in at the sides as it cooled, I decided to investigate ways to avoid future mishaps to my baking. All I can say is thank goodness for buttercream crumb coating as I was able to add a bit extra around the centre to straighten the sides up!

While it's impossible for me to know exactly what happened in any specific occasion I have put together a list of things you should look out for the next time you bake.

So if you have been similarly disappointed then read on...

MY CAKE HAS RISEN IN THE MIDDLE AND IS CRACKED

This happens when there is too much raising agent, the cake pan too small or the oven too hot. Most cakes baked in loaf, bar or ring pans crack slightly due to the confined space.

MY CAKE HAS SUNK IN THE MIDDLE

There are a number of reasons this can happen:

1. The oven door has been opened before the cake has set - a blast of cold air, generated by the door opening, can also cause the unset centre of a cake to sink. If you need to rotate the cake pans during baking, wait until the cake has baked for around 3/4 of the baking time and is almost fully set. Avoid opening and closing the oven door too sharply and move the pans around gently to minimise the risk of sinking
2. The cake didn't go in the oven as soon as the mixture was ready

3. Pan is too small – this can cause the cake to rise quickly, and then fall in the centre.
4. Oven Temperature - an oven that isn't properly calibrated and runs either too hot or too cold can easily make for a falling cake. If possible use an internal oven thermometer
5. If your cake sinks in the centre after removal from oven this generally means that the cake is undercooked
6. Overbeating - this is probably one of the most common reasons why cakes sink. Beating in too much air into the batter once the dry and wet ingredients are combined will only cause the batter to sink.

THE SIDES OF MY CAKE ARE CRUNCHY OR BURNT

There can be a number of reasons that can cause this issue:

1. Too much fat has been used to grease the tin
2. The cake tin is not sufficiently lined
3. The oven's too hot
4. The cake has been left in the oven for too long
5. The cake has been placed in the wrong oven position – usually the cake should be placed in the middle of the oven
6. The pan too small.

MY CAKE HAS A GOOEY CENTRE

Most likely the cake has not been cooked for long enough. When you check the cake before taking it out of the oven, a skewer should come out clean and the cake should feel the same in the middle as it does around the edges.

MY CAKE IS OVERCOOKED AND THIN BUT THE TEXTURE IS FINE

This happens when the cake tin is too big.

MY CAKE IS FLAT AND HAS LARGE AIR BUBBLES ON THE TOP

This could be because the cake did not go into the oven as soon as the mixture was ready or the oven was not hot enough when the cake went in.

I CAN NOT GET MY CAKE OUT OF THE TIN

Make sure your baking tin is well lined.

It can also mean that there is too much sugar or other sweetening in recipe.

MY CAKE IS VERY DENSE

This could be because the cake mixture did not have enough air beaten into it, the eggs were added too quickly and curdled or there was not enough raising agent.

MY CAKE HAS SPILLED OVER THE SIDES OF THE TIN

The cake tin is too small. It is always best to use the tin size stated in the recipe. If you do not have the correct size tin then avoid filling the tin more than three-quarters full and adjust cooking times accordingly.

EXCESSIVE SHRINKING

The oven is too hot and has caused the cake to overcook

COLLAR AROUND TOP OUTSIDE EDGE

Cake baked at too high a temperature

UNEVEN RISING

This could be because the oven shelf is not straight, the oven is not level on floor or you have not spread the mixture evenly in pan

SHRINKS AND WRINKLES DURING COOLING

This is usually due to insufficient baking time, or cooling the cake in a draught

PALE AND STICKY ON TOP

This is due to baking at too low an oven temperature, or placing the pan in the wrong oven position

AND... A FEW BONUS TIPS!

To avoid this happening again, you will need to spot the signs that tell you when your cake is done. Again, I cannot stress enough, you need to avoid opening your oven door until it is absolutely necessary.

Here are some signs to look out for:

The cake will look risen in the middle. Cakes cook at the outer edges first, so if the middle has started to rise, you are on the right track.

The cake will be starting to shrink away from the edges of the cake pan. This should be only very slightly. If the edges are starting to brown and dry, it has been in the oven too long.

The cake should 'spring back' under your fingers. If the cake has risen in the middle and the edges are starting to shrink away, open the oven door carefully and touch the centre of the cake. A properly baked cake will spring back slightly under your fingers if you press it gently. If your fingers leave a dent in the cake, it is not done yet.

A skewer inserted into the middle of the cake will come out clean (or with a tiny crumb or two on it).

Preheating IS important. Depending on your oven, it can take as long as 30 minutes for it to reach the optimal baking temperature. Always ensure you turn your oven on before starting your recipe or you may end up with an uneven, lumpy cake.

Centre your oven rack. Unless otherwise told, position your oven rack in the centre and place the cake pans right in the middle of the rack. If baking two cake layers at once, place them on the same rack side-by-side; don't put one on top of the other; they won't bake evenly that way.

Remember your cake will continue to cook after it has been removed from the oven. With practice, you will be able to spot the signs and remove your cake the moment it is ready to come out.