

## The Creamiest Baked Mac and Cheese - A Comfort Food Classic

never fails to bring comfort



**OVEN**  
**375°F**

**TIME**  
**15 min**

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### INGREDIENTS

For the Mac and Cheese:

- 16 oz elbow macaroni (or your favorite pasta shape)
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 4 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 3 cups whole milk
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika (optional, for extra flavor)
- 1 teaspoon mustard powder (optional, enhances the cheese flavor)
- 3 cups shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup shredded Gouda or Monterey Jack cheese

For the Crispy Topping:

- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder (optional)
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

How to Make Creamy Baked Mac and Cheese  
(Step-by-Step):

1. Cook the Pasta:
2. Make the Cheese Sauce:
3. Add the Cheese and Seasonings:
4. Combine with Pasta:
5. Make the Crispy Topping:

6. Bake Until Golden:

7. Let It Rest & Serve:

Pro Tips for the Best Baked Mac and Cheese:

Use freshly grated cheese - pre-shredded cheese has anti-caking agents that prevent smooth melting.

Don't overcook the pasta! Since it bakes, slightly undercooking it prevents mushy noodles.

For an extra creamy texture, add a splash of milk before baking.

Try different cheese combos - Gruyère, Swiss, or white cheddar add amazing flavor!

What to Serve With Mac and Cheese:

Grilled or fried chicken - for a classic combo.

Steamed broccoli or green beans - for a bit of freshness.

A fresh garden salad - to balance the richness.

## DIRECTIONS

1. **Cook the Pasta:** Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook the macaroni 1 minute less than al dente (since it will finish cooking in the oven). Drain and set aside.
2. **Make the Cheese Sauce:** In a large saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Whisk in the flour and cook for 1-2 minutes, stirring constantly, until it forms a smooth paste (this removes the raw flour taste).
3. Gradually whisk in the milk and heavy cream, stirring continuously to prevent lumps. Cook for 3-5 minutes, until the sauce thickens.
4. **Add the Cheese and Seasonings:** Turn the heat to low and stir in the salt, pepper, paprika, and mustard powder. Gradually add the cheddar, mozzarella, and Gouda cheese, stirring until fully melted and smooth.
5. **Combine with Pasta:** Pour the cheese sauce over the cooked macaroni and stir until evenly coated. Transfer to a greased 9x13-inch baking dish.
6. **Make the Crispy Topping:** In a small bowl, mix the panko breadcrumbs, melted butter, garlic powder, and Parmesan cheese. Sprinkle evenly over the mac and cheese.
7. **Bake Until Golden:** Bake at 375°F (190°C) for 20-25 minutes, or until the top is golden brown and bubbly.
8. **Let It Rest & Serve:** Let the mac and cheese sit for 5 minutes before serving-this helps it set and makes scooping easier.
9. **Pro Tips for the Best Baked Mac and Cheese:** Use freshly grated cheese - pre-shredded cheese has anti-caking agents that prevent smooth melting.

10. Don't overcook the pasta! Since it bakes, slightly undercooking it prevents mushy noodles.
11. For an extra creamy texture, add a splash of milk before baking.
12. Try different cheese combos - Gruyère, Swiss, or white cheddar add amazing flavor!
13. What to Serve With Mac and Cheese: This mac and cheese is great on its own, but pairs well with:
  14. Grilled or fried chicken - for a classic combo.
  15. Steamed broccoli or green beans - for a bit of freshness.
  16. A fresh garden salad - to balance the richness.
  17. BBQ ribs or pulled pork - the ultimate comfort food pairing.
18. FAQs (From My Kitchen to Yours): Q: Can I make this mac and cheese ahead of time?A: Yes! Assemble everything (but don't bake), cover tightly, and refrigerate for up to 2 days. When ready to bake, let it sit at room temp for 30 minutes, then bake as directed.
19. Q: Can I freeze baked mac and cheese?A: Yes! Let it cool completely, then wrap tightly and freeze for up to 2 months. Thaw in the fridge overnight and reheat in the oven at 350°F for 20 minutes.
20. Q: How do I keep mac and cheese creamy?A: Use whole milk and heavy cream for richness. Also, avoid overbaking-too much time in the oven can dry it out.
21. Q: Can I add meat or veggies?A: Definitely! Stir in cooked bacon, ham, shredded chicken, or sautéed spinach before baking for a heartier dish.
22. Why You'll Love This Recipe: This Creamy Baked Mac and Cheese is the perfect balance of creamy, cheesy, and crispy. It's easy to make, super satisfying, and packed with flavor. Whether you're serving it for a holiday meal, weeknight dinner, or potluck gathering, it's guaranteed to be a crowd favorite!
23. Try this recipe and let me know how you like it! Did you add a special twist, like extra spices or mix-ins? However you make it, one thing's for sure-it's pure comfort food perfection. Happy cooking!

**More recipes: [ChefManiac.com](https://chefmaniac.com)**

Original recipe: <https://chefmaniac.com/the-creamiest-baked-mac-and-cheese-a-comfort-food-classic/>