

Crockpot Macaroni and Cheese



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This creamy crockpot mac and cheese starts with **uncooked elbow pasta**; no boiling these noodles. Simply throw the milk, **cheese**, and seasonings in the **slow cooker** for a meal everyone will love!

The slow cooker is super portable and the dish won't dry out. This is a great casserole to take to a potluck or family get together.



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Creamy Crockpot Mac and Cheese

There are lots of [different ways to make mac and cheese](#), but two of them are more popular than others. The first type is southern or baked mac and cheese, which includes eggs and is almost like a casserole. The second type is [cooked on the stovetop](#) in a béchamel sauce. There are no eggs and it is super creamy.



In order to get that ultra creamy texture in a crock pot, you either have to use condensed cheese soup or Velveeta cheese, neither of which appealed to me.

The next best thing is to use evaporated milk and American cheese, the kind you get from the deli counter. Barring American cheese, using a melty cheese like Muenster or Havarti will also produce creamy results.

If you are making for the holidays

If you've never made this before, please do a dry run before the holiday! Everyone's slow cooker acts differently, so it's important to try this out first. Please read through the FAQ below as well for best results.

Frequently Asked Questions

There have been quite a few questions on this recipe, please check here before asking in the comments as it may already have been answered. PLEASE READ the notes in the printed recipe.

Can I double this recipe and does it change the cooking time?

Yes, this recipe can be doubled provided you have a large enough slow cooker. The cooking time will not change.

I don't eat yellow cheese, what is a good white substitute?

Muenster works well, as does White American and White Cheddar. A marble cheese should work as well. Sharp cheddars will give this dish the best flavor, try Vermont white sharp cheddar!

Can I make this ahead and reheat it?

We don't recommend reheating macaroni and cheese as it never tastes quite the same and there's a possibility that the macaroni will become mushy. However, if this is a deal breaker, you can reheat it – simply add some milk to loosen the thickened sauce while reheating. We recommend making it and having it ready right before you leave. Turn off the slow cooker but leave the lid on. When you arrive stir it and loosen with milk if needed.

Why was my mac and cheese gritty?

Prepackaged shredded cheese contains an anti-caking agent that can cause your final product to taste gritty. Purchase your cheese from the deli and shred it yourself. We've also discovered that some less expensive cheeses are gritty even when you shred them yourself, but after the mac and cheese sits for a while the grittiness goes away.

Why was my mac and cheese mushy?

If it cooks too fast or too long it will get mushy. The biggest culprit is thin macaroni noodles. We use Barilla brand and have also used Creamette. These noodles are thicker and sometimes have ridges. Thinner noodles will cook much faster and turn mushy.

Another reason could be an older slow cooker that may cook hotter (even on low) than a newer crock pot. Leave the lid on for one hour on low. DON'T increase the temp to High! Stir after one hour then check after 15 more minutes. Check and stir every 15 minutes after that if needed. Mine was done in 1 hour and 45 minutes.

Mushy mac and cheese can also be the result of using gluten free macaroni noodles as they do not hold up as well. One of our readers made this successfully with gluten free pasta. she said hers was done in 90 minutes but began to get mushy at 2 hours, so it's important to keep an eye on it!

Can I mix all of the ingredients, refrigerate overnight, and put in the crockpot a few hours prior to serving?

Yes, with the exception of the pasta. Wait until you take it out of the fridge and are turning the slow cooker on before you add the macaroni.

I'm confused by the cooking time, is it 2 hours or 3?

Actually, it's up to 3 hours. You should cook the dish on low for 1 hour, then stir it and check for doneness. After that, check it periodically (every thirty minutes or so) until it is done. The actual cooking time is completely dependent on the slow cooker you have (similar to ovens, they all cook differently), hence the "up to 3 hours" instruction.



To keep our mac and cheese from being bland we added mustard, garlic, and cayenne to ours in addition to the basic salt and pepper. These can all be adjusted to your taste.



Ingredients

- 1 pound elbow pasta uncooked (regular, NOT gluten free, NOT quick cook pasta) We use Barilla brand
- 2 ½ cups whole milk
- 12 ounces evaporated milk
- 12 ounces Extra sharp cheddar 3 cups shredded (from the deli, shred yourself, don't buy bagged)
- 4 ounces American cheese 1 cup shredded (from the deli, not processed slices)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper

- ½ teaspoon dry mustard
- ¼ teaspoon garlic powder
- Dash of cayenne pepper to taste
- ¼ cup butter cubed

Things You'll Need

- [5-6 qt Crockpot](#)
- [Food processor](#) for shredding cheese
- [Liquid measure](#)
- [Measuring cups and spoons](#)

Before You Begin

- **IMPORTANT** – please do not use the bagged shredded cheese. It contains an anti-caking agent that can make your mac and cheese gritty. Get the cheese from the deli and shred it yourself.
- **PASTA** – please use a sturdy pasta, not the really thin noodles. Thin noodles will cook much faster and turn to mush. Since the pandemic manufacturers have changed their noodles, look for sturdy ones!
- Also, every slow cooker is different. Newer slow cookers should work fine for this recipe. Cook on low for one hour without disturbing. Remove lid and stir well. **Replace lid and check every 30 minutes after that. DO NOT turn the heat up! You will make your macaroni mushy.** My slow cooker is only a couple years old and my mac and cheese is done after about 1 hr and 45 minutes.
- For **BEST RESULTS** be sure to [read the Frequently Asked Questions in the blog post](#) before making your mac and cheese.
- **Making for the holidays?** If you've never made this before, please do a dry run before the holiday! Everyone's slow cooker acts differently, so it's important to try this out first. Happy Thanksgiving and Merry Christmas!

Instructions

- Spray 6-quart slow cooker with non-stick spray.
- Rinse the uncooked pasta well in cold water and drain.
1 pound elbow pasta
- Add uncooked pasta to crockpot along with milks, cheeses, salt, pepper, mustard, garlic and cayenne pepper. Stir to combine, making sure macaroni is submerged in liquid as much as possible.
2 1/2 cups whole milk, 12 ounces evaporated milk, 12 ounces Extra sharp cheddar, 4 ounces American cheese, 1 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon black pepper, 1/2 teaspoon dry mustard, 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder, Dash of cayenne pepper

- Dot with cubed butter.
1/4 cup butter
- Cover and cook on low heat for 1 hour. Remove lid and stir, be quick! Don't let too much heat out. Depending on your slow cooker, your dish could be done at this point or require UP TO 1-2 more hours.
- If not done, continue cooking and checking periodically (ever half hour or so).
- When done, pasta will be tender and liquid will be thick and creamy. Sauce will thicken even more after lid is removed and mac and cheese sits.

Expert Tips & FAQs

- Condensed milk is sweetened and the two **cannot** be used interchangeably. **Use evaporated milk.**
- Don't use regular milk in place of evaporated milk. However, you can create your own evaporated milk. To make 1 cup of evaporated milk, simmer 2 1/4 cups of regular milk down until it becomes 1 cup. Replacing the evaporated milk with regular milk will result in sauce that is too runny because of the water content in regular milk.
- For the milk in the ingredient list, use whole milk as directed. Using a lower fat milk can add more water and make your mac and cheese more liquidy and not cook properly.

Nutrition

Serving: 1cup | Calories: 574cal | Carbohydrates: 51g | Protein: 26g | Fat: 29g | Saturated Fat: 17g | Cholesterol: 90mg | Sodium: 923mg | Potassium: 426mg | Fiber: 1g | Sugar: 10g | Vitamin A: 985IU | Vitamin C: 0.8mg | Calcium: 672mg | Iron: 1.2mg

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The recipes on this blog are tested with a conventional gas oven and gas stovetop. It's important to note that some ovens, especially as they age, can cook and bake inconsistently. Using an inexpensive oven thermometer can assure you that your oven is truly heating to the proper temperature. If you use a toaster oven or countertop oven, please keep in mind that they may not distribute heat the same as a conventional full sized oven and you may need to adjust your cooking/baking times. In the case of recipes made with a pressure cooker, air fryer, slow cooker, or other appliance, a link to the appliances we use is listed within each respective recipe. For baking recipes where measurements are given by weight, please note that results may not be the same if cups are used instead, and we can't guarantee success with that method.

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Amanda Davis is the entrepreneurial mom of four grown children and four step children. She and her husband, Chef Antoine, love to cook together creating recipes for this blog. Amanda also make kid's crafts and creates decorative items for her home. She is a crafting expert and guru in the kitchen and has appeared online and in print publications many times over the years. She is also a craft book author five times over and product developer as well as the owner of [FunFamilyCrafts.com](#). You can find her on social media by using the buttons to the left!