

Fried Mac-and-Cheese Balls

VEGETARIAN / CAN BE GLUTEN-FREE / 3 INGREDIENTS

This recipe seems like a state fair gimmick. Hardly! These little balls are so tasty, they'll be a hit no matter where you serve them. We tested this recipe using frozen regular mac and cheese, low-fat mac and cheese, and even gluten free mac and cheese. They all work.

But there are two tricks. One, the mac and cheese must be very cold so the cheese doesn't melt immediately. If you're a slow worker in the kitchen, consider putting the first coated balls in the refrigerator while you make more.

Two, dip and redip those balls until they begin to hold together. The pasta wants to "unravel" and stick out of a ball. Keep rolling the balls until it doesn't.

In the smallest air fryers, you may have to make even the small amount in batches. Make sure there's adequate air flow between the balls so they can get crisp.

INGREDIENTS	2-quart or larger air fryer	5.25-quart or larger air fryer
Seasoned Italian-style dried bread crumbs (gluten-free, if a concern)	1 cup	1½ cups
10- to 12-ounce package(s) frozen mac and cheese (gluten-free, if a concern), thawed but still cold	1	2
Olive oil spray	As needed	As needed
MAKES	<i>About 8 balls</i>	<i>About 16 balls</i>

1. With the basket (or basket attachment) in the air fryer, heat it to 400°F (or 390°F, if that's the closest setting).

2. Pour the bread crumbs into a medium bowl. Scoop up 2 tablespoons of the mac and cheese. Using clean hands, form it into a ball between your palms (it may not be perfect), then roll it in the bread crumbs to coat. Roll it again into a ball, then set it back into the bread crumbs, perhaps doing this a few times to make sure that the ball holds together, that it's compact and coated. Set aside and make more.

3. Coat the balls with olive oil spray, then set them in the basket with as much air space between them as possible. Air-fry undisturbed for 10 minutes, or *just* until browned and crisp. Be very careful: If you overcook these balls, the cheese will melt and start to run out.

4. Use a nonstick-safe spatula, and perhaps kitchen tongs for balance, to *gently* transfer the balls to a wire rack or a cutting board. Cool for 5 minutes before serving.

Then...

- Set these air-fried balls of cheese bliss in bowls of chili.
- Serve them slathered in **Spicy Ketchup Dip** (page 66).
- Offer **Arugula and Pistachio Salad** (page 197) or **Honey Mustard Cole Slaw** (page 215) on the side.