

Cheesy Creamy Broccoli Pasta: The Ultimate Comfort Food Recipe

When comfort food calls, this **Cheesy Creamy Broccoli Pasta** is the answer. This isn't just pasta with a bit of cheese; it's a rich, velvety, and utterly decadent dish that is essentially a sophisticated broccoli mac and cheese. It features a homemade cheese sauce—a classic Mornay—that is smooth, sharp, and nutty, clinging to every noodle and floret. This is the ultimate comfort food recipe, perfect for a cold evening, a bad day, or any time you need a meal that feels like a warm hug. It's hearty, satisfying, and surprisingly easy to make from scratch.

The Secret to Ultimate Creaminess: The Mornay Sauce

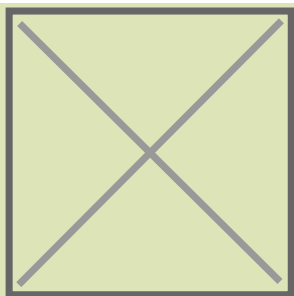
The heart of this **Cheesy Creamy Broccoli Pasta** is a classic French Mornay sauce, which is simply a béchamel (white sauce) with cheese melted into it. This is what separates it from a “broken” or grainy cheese sauce. By building this stable, creamy base, you guarantee a perfectly smooth and luxurious texture every single time.

Mastering the Roux (Butter and Flour)

The sauce starts with a “roux,” a paste made from equal parts melted butter and all-purpose flour.¹³ This is the vital thickening agent. You melt the butter in a large pot, then whisk in the flour. It's crucial to cook this paste for at least one minute, whisking constantly. This cooks out the raw “flour” taste and prepares it to absorb the milk.

Why Whisking in Milk Slowly Matters

Once your roux is toasted and bubbly, you must add your milk (whole milk is best for richness) *slowly*. Pour in about one cup of milk while whisking vigorously. It will seize up and look like paste—this is normal. Keep whisking until it's smooth, then begin adding the rest of the milk in a slow, steady stream. This gradual process prevents lumps and ensures your béchamel base is perfectly smooth. You'll then simmer this, stirring, until it's thick enough to coat the back of a spoon.



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- Author: [Aaron recipes](#)
- Total Time: [30 minutes](#)
- Yield: [8 servings](#) [1x](#)

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Description

This Cheesy Creamy Broccoli Pasta is the ultimate comfort food recipe. A homemade, velvety cheese sauce made with cheddar and Gruyère coats tender broccoli and pasta shells.

Ingredients

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Scale [1x](#) [2x](#) [3x](#)

- ☐ 1 lb Medium Pasta Shells (or Cavatappi)1 lb Broccoli, cut into small florets1/4 cup Unsalted Butter1/4 cup All-Purpose Flour4 cups Whole Milk1/2 tsp Garlic Powder1/2 tsp Onion Powder1 tsp Salt1/2 tsp Black Pepper2 cups (8 oz) Sharp Cheddar, freshly shredded1 cup (4 oz) Gruyère Cheese, freshly shredded
- ☐ Cook Mode Prevent your screen from going dark

Instructions

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook according to package directions.
2. In the last 3 minutes of the pasta’s cooking time, add the small broccoli florets to the pot.
3. Cook for the final 3 minutes, then drain the pasta and broccoli together in a colander. Shake well to remove excess water.
4. While the pasta cooks, make the cheese sauce. In a large pot or Dutch oven, melt the butter over medium heat.
5. Whisk in the flour and cook, whisking constantly, for 1 minute.
6. Slowly pour in about 1 cup of the milk, whisking vigorously until a smooth paste forms. Gradually whisk in the remaining milk until no lumps remain.
7. Add the garlic powder, onion powder, salt, and pepper. Bring to a simmer, stirring often, and cook for 5-7 minutes, until the sauce has thickened enough to coat the back of a spoon.
8. Turn off the heat. Add the shredded cheddar and Gruyère cheese to the pot.
9. Stir until the cheeses are completely melted and the sauce is velvety smooth.
10. Add the drained pasta and broccoli to the pot with the cheese sauce.
11. Stir gently to combine, ensuring every piece of pasta and broccoli is coated. Serve immediately.

Notes

Shred your own cheese: This is the most important tip. Pre-shredded cheese contains anti-caking powders and will result in a grainy sauce. Use a block and grate it yourself. Remove from heat: Always turn off the heat **before** adding the cheese. The residual heat of the milk will melt it perfectly and prevent it from curdling. Broccoli Hack: Adding the broccoli to the pasta water saves a pot and cooks it perfectly.

- Prep Time: 10 minutes
- Cook Time: 20 minutes
- Category: Main Course
- Method: Stovetop
- Cuisine: American

Nutrition

- **Serving Size:** 1.5 cups
- **Calories:** 560
- **Sugar:** 6g
- **Sodium:** 600mg
- **Fat:** 28g
- **Saturated Fat:** 17g
- **Unsaturated Fat:** 11g
- **Trans Fat:** 1g
- **Carbohydrates:** 50g
- **Fiber:** 4g
- **Protein:** 26g
- **Cholesterol:** 75mg

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Choosing Your Cheese Blend

With your béchamel base thick and hot, it's time for the most important part: the cheese. The key to a great cheese sauce is to *remove the pan from the heat* before adding the cheese.¹⁴ This prevents the cheese from overheating and becoming grainy. A blend of cheeses is ideal for creating a complex flavor.

Sharp Cheddar for the Flavor Punch

Sharp (or extra-sharp) cheddar is the backbone of this sauce. It provides that classic, tangy “cheesy” flavor that we all associate with comfort food. It delivers the assertive flavor punch that

can stand up to the milk and pasta, ensuring the dish tastes distinctly cheesy, not just milky.

Gruyère for the Nutty, Melty Goodness

While cheddar brings the punch, Gruyère brings the sophistication. This Swiss cheese is famous for its “stretch” and “meltability.” More importantly, it adds a delicious, nutty, and slightly sweet flavor that elevates the entire dish from “kid food” to a gourmet comfort classic. The combination of sharp cheddar and nutty Gruyère is a match made in heaven.

Cheese	Flavor Profile	Why We Use It
Sharp Cheddar	Tangy, assertive, “cheesy”	The primary flavor base
Gruyère	Nutty, complex, salty	Adds depth and “gooey” texture
Parmesan (optional)	Salty, granular, savory	Adds a finishing kick of umami

The Pasta and Broccoli: A Perfect Pair

With such a rich sauce, the choice of pasta and the broccoli cooking method are important. You need a pasta shape that can handle the thick, cheesy sauce, and you need the broccoli to be perfectly cooked.

Why Shells or Cavatappi are Best

This is a job for a pasta with “architecture.” Medium shells are a classic choice because their cup-like shape acts as a tiny bowl, capturing the cheese sauce. Cavatappi (corkscrews) are also a fantastic option, as their ridges and hollow center trap the sauce beautifully.¹⁵ You want a shape that delivers maximum sauce in every bite.

The 3-Minute Broccoli Hack

You don’t need a separate pot for the broccoli. This recipe uses a brilliant, time-saving hack. Simply add your small, bite-sized broccoli florets directly to the boiling pasta water during the *last 3 minutes* of the pasta’s cooking time. The broccoli will blanch to a perfect, tender-crisp texture and vibrant green color. Then, you can drain the pasta and broccoli together in one colander.

Step-by-Step to Your Comfort Food Fix

This recipe comes together in two main parts: cooking the pasta/broccoli and making the cheese sauce. You can easily do them at the same time.

Building the Cheese Sauce from Scratch

While your pasta water is heating, start the sauce. Melt the butter, whisk in the flour, and cook for one minute. Slowly whisk in the milk and seasonings (garlic powder, onion powder, salt, and pepper) and bring to a simmer. Let it thicken for 5-7 minutes, stirring. Once your pasta and broccoli are drained, turn off the heat under your sauce. Slowly stir in your shredded cheeses until the sauce is velvety smooth.

Combining for Maximum Coverage

Pour the drained (and well-shaken) pasta and broccoli directly into the pot with the cheese sauce. Use a large spoon or spatula to fold everything together gently. Ensure every single piece of pasta and broccoli is completely coated in the glorious, cheesy, creamy sauce. Serve immediately.

Taking Your Cheesy Creamy Broccoli Pasta Over the Top

This dish is the ultimate comfort food as-is, but it also serves as a perfect base for a “loaded” mac and cheese. If you have a few extra minutes, these additions are well worth it.

Making it a “Baked” Pasta

Want a crispy, golden-brown top? Pour the finished pasta into a 9×13 baking dish. Top with a mixture of Panko breadcrumbs, melted butter, and a little more Parmesan. Bake at 375°F (190°C) for 15-20 minutes, or until the top is golden and the edges are bubbling. This adds a fantastic textural contrast.

Add-Ins: Bacon, Chicken, or Breadcrumbs

This cheesy pasta is a perfect vehicle for other flavors. Crumbled, crispy bacon is a classic addition. Stirring in shredded rotisserie chicken makes it an even heartier, protein-packed meal. A dash of hot sauce or smoked paprika stirred into the cheese sauce can also add a wonderful, smoky depth.

Troubleshooting Your Cheese Sauce

A homemade cheese sauce is easy, but a few common issues can arise. The good news is they are all preventable. This is a common challenge, but so is getting the dressing right on a [cowboy pasta salad](#); practice makes perfect.

How to Fix a Grainy or Gritty Sauce

A grainy sauce is 99% of the time caused by one of two things: the heat was too high when you added the cheese, or you used pre-shredded, bagged cheese. Always, *always* remove the pot from the heat before stirring in the cheese. And always grate your own cheese from a block. Bagged cheese contains powders (like potato starch) to prevent caking, and these powders will make your sauce gritty.

What to Do if Your Sauce is Too Thick

If your final sauce seems too thick or “clumpy,” don’t worry. Your pasta was likely very starchy. Simply stir in a splash of the milk you have leftover, or even a bit of the starchy pasta water (if you remembered to save some) over low heat. Whisk it in, and the sauce will loosen up to a perfect, creamy consistency.

Frequently Asked Questions

Question 1? Why did my cheese sauce get grainy?

Answer: You most likely overheated the cheese. Once your milk/flour base (béchamel) is thick, you must turn off the heat before you add the shredded cheese. The residual heat of the milk is more than enough to melt it smoothly. High heat will cause the proteins in the cheese to curdle and separate, resulting in a grainy texture.

Question 2? Can I really use pre-shredded cheese?

Answer: It is highly discouraged. Pre-shredded cheese is coated in anti-caking agents like potato starch or cellulose.¹⁶ These powders will create a chalky, gritty texture in your sauce and prevent the cheese from melting properly. Grating your own cheese from a block is the single most important step for a smooth sauce.

Question 3? What's the best way to reheat this pasta?

Answer: This dish reheats beautifully. The best way is on the stovetop. Add the cold pasta to a small saucepan with a splash of milk over low heat. Stir gently and constantly until the pasta is warmed through. The milk will “revive” the sauce, making it creamy and velvety again.

Conclusion

This **Cheesy Creamy Broccoli Pasta** is the ultimate comfort food for a reason. It's rich, satisfying, and loaded with the kind of flavor that soothes the soul. By taking a few extra minutes to build a classic, stable cheese sauce from scratch, you are rewarding yourself with a dish that is infinitely better than anything from a box. It's a “mac and cheese” that grew up, put on its Sunday best, and is ready to make your week a whole lot better.