

## Today's Oxymoron: Dairy-Free, Gluten-Free Mac and Cheese

When I returned to a dairy-free lifestyle, I scoured the Internet for recipes and ideas, as I am certain many people do. Yet, there was one cookbook that seemed to appear with almost every search, *The Ultimate Uncheese Cookbook*. While intrigued by the title, I have never missed cheese much, so it was filed away in my memory banks. Yet, that book kept coming up "so many great recipes, not just cheesy options." Finally giving into the pressure, I acquired this holy grail of dairy-free "cheese" living. It is true; this cookbook is loaded with various types of recipes from vegan pizzas to salad dressing, and of course just about every mock cheese I could imagine.

Feeling that the "cheese" was still the most important element of this book, I decided to go for a true comfort recipe first, the Traditional Macaroni and Cheez. Okay, the cheez part isn't traditional, but you get the idea.

As luck would have it, the elbow macaroni I had on hand was from Northern Quinoa Corporation. Known as Organic Quinoa Elbows, these little gems were made of only organic brown rice, organic quinoa, and water. As long as I was going gluten-free with the noodles, why not make the whole thing gluten-free? What the heck, while I'm at it, lets just replace that soymilk with another milk alternative for a soy-free meal too. Of course, you can just stick with the vegan and dairy-free aspect if you have no other special diet needs. Obviously, this is an insanely versatile recipe!

So, I bet you are wondering how it tasted (recipe to follow) ...

While a bit different than your standard artificial cheese variety, it was pretty good. It had a mellow cheese vibe, and an excellent creamy texture. I cooked my quinoa elbows a bit too long, making for a mushier casserole. I highly recommend making sure your noodles are just barely al dente prior to baking. Also, I had to thin out the "cheese" sauce a bit, as it was more like a giant glob of dough. Luckily, it is easy to add milk alternative as you cook, until it reaches the desired consistency.

This recipe can be found in both *Vegan Vittles* and *The Ultimate Uncheese Cookbook*, but I did find one minor difference. *Vegan Vittles: Second Helpings*, Jo Stepaniak's newest cookbook, notes 1 to 2 Tablespoons of margarine dotted across the top before baking as an option. I thought this seemed like a good idea and went for it. I also added some dice red bell peppers for color and nutrition, and will probably add some diced onions and chopped broccoli next time. Overall, both my husband and I were satisfied, and it was an insanely easy meal to make. Enjoy the recipe (with gluten-free note that follows); I am off to trial the Spinach and Cheez Calzones!

Traditional Macaroni and Cheez  
Recipe From: *The Ultimate Uncheese Cookbook*

2 1/2 cups dry elbow macaroni  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1/3 cup flour (any kind; your choice)  
1/2 teaspoon dry mustard  
Pinch of cayenne  
1 3/4 cups plain nondairy milk, heated [almond or soymilk work well]  
1/2 cup nutritional yeast flakes [check bulk foods or the flour department]  
Salt and pepper  
1/2 cup packed whole-grain bread crumbs (optional)  
1 to 2 tablespoons vegan margarine (optional) [from *Vegan Vittles*]

Preheat oven to 375°F. Oil an 8-inch square baking dish or mist it with nonstick cooking spray and set aside. Cook macaroni according to package directions. Drain well and set aside.

While macaroni is cooking, prepare cheez sauce. Heat oil in a large saucepan. When hot, stir in flour, mustard, and cayenne. Cook and stir 1 minute. Gradually stir in hot milk, a little at a time, whisking constantly. (It will take about 5 to 7 minutes to add the milk. The sauce should continue to bubble as you add the milk; if it doesn't, you are adding the milk too quickly). If necessary, cook the sauce until it is the consistency of thick cream, about 2 to 4 minutes longer. Remove from heat and stir in nutritional yeast flakes. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Stir in cooked macaroni, and mix well. Transfer to the prepared baking dish. Sprinkle bread crumbs, if using, evenly over top. [Dot with vegan margarine, if desired] Bake 25 to 30 minutes. Let stand for 5 minutes before serving.

**Gluten-Free Note:** To keep this gluten-free, use the gf flour of your choice. Brown rice flour will work, but tapioca or arrowroot flour may offer a smoother "cheese." Also, use some gluten-free breadcrumbs (I just happened to have some on hand), and gluten-free macaroni.