

- Prep Time: 20 minutes
- Cook Time: 10–12 minutes (per batch)
- Chilling Time: 20 minutes
- Total Time: ~50 minutes
- Yield: 16 to 18 bites (approx. 4 serving portions)
- Cooking Intensity Level: Medium (Requires quick steaming, proper binding, breading, and high-heat air frying)

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Heat & Cooking Intensity Guide

Achieving the perfect texture—a crispy shell with a melty center that doesn't fall apart—requires a careful transition between prep temperatures and cooking heat:

- Steam Intensity (Medium Heat): A quick 2-minute steam softens the broccoli just enough to chop finely without rendering it mushy or releasing excess moisture into the mixture.
- Chilling Intensity (Low Temperature – Freezing/Cooling): Chilling the shaped balls at low temperatures for 20 minutes firms up the butter and cheese proteins, ensuring the bites hold their shape and do not dissolve during air frying.
- Air Frying Intensity (High Heat – 375°F / 190°C): High-speed rapid air circulation cooks the breadcrumbs rapidly to a rich golden brown while melting the cheese inside before the structural integrity weakens.

Ingredients

For the Broccoli & Cheese Base:

- Fresh Broccoli Florets: 3 cups (approx. 300g), finely chopped after light steaming
- Sharp Cheddar Cheese: 1 1/2 cups (150g), freshly shredded (*freshly shredded melts much better than pre-shredded bag cheese*)
- Mozzarella Cheese: 1/2 cup (50g), shredded (for extra stretch and moisture binding)
- Large Egg: 1, lightly beaten
- Plain Breadcrumbs or Fine Panko: 1/2 cup (45g)
- Garlic Powder: 1/2 teaspoon
- Onion Powder: 1/2 teaspoon
- Smoked Paprika: 1/4 teaspoon
- Fine Sea Salt: 1/2 teaspoon
- Black Pepper: 1/4 teaspoon

For the Outer Crispy Coating:

- All-Purpose Flour: 1/3 cup (40g)
- Large Eggs: 2, beaten with 1 tablespoon of water
- Panko Breadcrumbs: 1 cup (90g), Japanese-style for maximum crunch
- Olive Oil or Avocado Oil Spray: For spraying the bites before air frying

Step-by-Step Cooking Instructions

Step 1: Steam and Chop the Broccoli

1. Place 3 cups of fresh broccoli florets into a microwave-safe bowl with 2 tablespoons of water. Cover with a paper towel and microwave on high for 90 seconds to 2 minutes until tender-crisp. Alternatively, steam over boiling water for 2 minutes.
2. Immediately drain the water and pat the broccoli dry thoroughly with clean paper towels. Moisture is the enemy of crispiness; removing excess water prevents soggy bites.
3. Place the steamed broccoli on a cutting board and chop it into very small, fine pieces.

Step 2: Combine the Cheese & Binding Mixture

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine the finely chopped broccoli, sharp cheddar cheese, mozzarella cheese, beaten egg, 1/2 cup plain breadcrumbs, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, salt, and black pepper.
2. Mix thoroughly with a spatula or your hands until the ingredients are evenly distributed and hold together when squeezed.

Step 3: Shape and Chill

1. Scoop out 1.5-tablespoon portions of the mixture and press tightly between your palms to form compact, round balls (about the size of a ping-pong ball).
2. Arrange the shaped bites on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
3. Place the tray in the freezer for 15 to 20 minutes (or refrigerator for 35 minutes). *This step is essential to firm up the fat content so the bites maintain their round structure during cooking.*

Step 4: Bread the Bites (3-Station Dredging System)

1. Set up three shallow bowls side-by-side:
 - Bowl 1: All-purpose flour.
 - Bowl 2: 2 large eggs whisked with 1 tbsp water.
 - Bowl 3: Panko breadcrumbs seasoned with a pinch of salt.
2. Remove the chilled broccoli bites from the freezer.
3. Lightly roll each ball in the flour (shaking off any excess), dip completely into the egg wash, and roll in the panko breadcrumbs, pressing gently so the crumbs adhere evenly.

Step 5: Air Fry to Golden Perfection (High Intensity)

1. Preheat your air fryer to 375°F (190°C) for 3 to 5 minutes.
2. Lightly spray the air fryer basket with non-stick olive oil or avocado oil cooking spray.
3. Place the breaded broccoli bites in the basket in a single layer, ensuring they do not touch to allow proper airflow. (Cook in two batches if necessary).
4. Generously spray the tops of the bites with cooking spray to help the panko brown

evenly.

5. Air fry at 375°F (190°C) for 10 to 12 minutes, gently flipping them over at the 6-minute mark and spraying lightly with oil again, until deep golden brown and crispy.

Step 6: Serve and Rest

1. Remove the bites carefully with tongs and let them rest on a cooling rack for 2 to 3 minutes before serving. *(This allows the melted cheese inside to settle slightly so it doesn't burst out on the first bite).*
2. Serve warm alongside your favorite dipping sauce (ranch dressing, honey mustard, or marinara sauce).

Pro-Tips for Recipe Success

- **Shred Your Own Cheese:** Pre-packaged shredded cheeses contain anti-caking agents (like potato starch) that hinder smooth melting and make binding harder.
- **Panko for Superior Crunch:** Using Japanese panko breadcrumbs for the outer coating yields a significantly lighter, airier crunch than standard dry breadcrumbs.
- **Make-Ahead & Freeze:** You can assemble and bread these bites in advance, freeze them on a tray until solid, and store them in a zip-top freezer bag for up to 2 months. Cook directly from frozen at 375°F (190°C) for 13–15 minutes.

Complete Nutritional Information

(Calculated per serving based on 4 total portions – approximately 4-5 bites per serving)

Nutrient	Amount per Serving	% Daily Value*
Calories	295 kcal	—

Nutrient	Amount per Serving	% Daily Value*
Total Fat	15.5g	20%
Saturated Fat	8.0g	40%
Trans Fat	0.0g	—
Cholesterol	115mg	38%
Sodium	520mg	23%
Total Carbohydrates	24g	9%
Dietary Fiber	2.5g	9%
Total Sugars	2.0g	—
<i>(Includes Added Sugars)</i>	<i>(0.0g)</i>	<i>(0%)</i>
Protein	15.5g	31%
Vitamin D	0.8mcg	4%
Calcium	320mg	25%
Iron	2.1mg	12%
Potassium	260mg	6%
Vitamin A	850 IU	17%
Vitamin C	45mg	50%