Prep Time: 20 minutes
Cook Time: 12 minutes
Total Time: 32 minutes
Servings: 4 (Makes about 16 bites)

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Introduction

Are you looking for a way to get your family to eat more greens? Or perhaps you need the perfect crowd-pleasing appetizer for game day that won't leave you feeling sluggish? Look no further than these Air Fryer Broccoli Cheese Bites.

These bites are the ultimate culinary hybrid: the health benefits of broccoli meet the comfort of melted cheese and a crispy golden crust. By using an air fryer, we achieve that deep-fried crunch without the vat of oil, making this a guilt-free snack that is ready in minutes. Whether you serve them with a side of marinara, ranch, or a spicy aioli, these bites are guaranteed to disappear faster than you can make them.

Ingredients

For the Bites:

- 4 cups fresh broccoli florets (about 2 medium heads)
- 1 ½ cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese (or a Mexican blend)
- ¾ cup Panko breadcrumbs (plus extra for coating)
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- Cooking spray (olive oil or avocado oil)

For the Coating Station:

- ½ cup all-purpose flour (or gluten-free blend)
- 2 large eggs, beaten (separate from the mix above)
- 1 cup Panko breadcrumbs

Optional Dipping Sauces:

- Ranch dressing
- Marinara sauce
- Spicy mayonnaise

Equipment

- Air Fryer
- Food Processor (or sharp knife and cutting board)
- Mixing bowls (3 for the breading station)

- Cheesecloth or clean kitchen towel (for draining broccoli)
- Cookie scoop (optional, for uniform sizing)

Instructions

Phase 1: Preparation & Blanching (Time: 10 Minutes | Intensity: Low)

1. Prep the Broccoli: Rinse the broccoli florets thoroughly. If the florets are large, chop them into smaller, bite-sized pieces.
2. Blanch: Bring a pot of salted water to a boil. Add the broccoli and cook for 2 minutes until bright green and slightly tender. *Do not overcook.*
3. Shock & Dry: Immediately transfer the broccoli to a bowl of ice water to stop the cooking process. Once cooled, drain the broccoli.
4. The Crucial Step: Wrap the broccoli in a clean kitchen towel or cheesecloth and squeeze out as much water as humanly possible. This is the most important step; if the broccoli is wet, the bites will fall apart. You want the broccoli to be dry.
5. Chop: Finely chop the dried broccoli. You want it small enough to hold together in a patty, but not a paste.

Phase 2: Mixing the Filling (Time: 5 Minutes | Intensity: Medium)

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine the chopped broccoli, shredded cheddar cheese, ¾ cup Panko breadcrumbs, ½ cup Parmesan cheese, minced garlic, onion powder, smoked paprika, salt, and pepper.

2. Add the 2 beaten eggs to the mixture. Use your hands or a sturdy spatula to mix everything until it is well combined and holds together when squeezed.

3. Taste Test: (Optional but recommended) Take a small pinch of the mixture and fry it in a pan to check the seasoning. Adjust salt and pepper if necessary.

Phase 3: The Breading Station (Time: 5 Minutes | Intensity: Medium)

Set up your breading station using three shallow bowls:

1. Bowl 1: All-purpose flour.

2. Bowl 2: The remaining 2 beaten eggs.

3. Bowl 3: The remaining 1 cup of Panko breadcrumbs.

Phase 4: Forming & Coating (Time: 10 Minutes | Intensity: Medium-High)

1. Form: Using a cookie scoop or your hands, scoop about 2 tablespoons of the broccoli mixture and roll it into a ball. Flatten it slightly into a puck shape (like a small patty).

2. Dredge: Roll the bite in the flour, shaking off the excess.

3. Egg Wash: Dip it into the beaten eggs, ensuring it is fully coated.

4. Coat: Press the bite into the Panko breadcrumbs, ensuring an even coating covers the entire surface. Set aside on a plate.

5. Repeat with the remaining mixture. You should yield about 16 bites.

Phase 5: Air Frying (Time: 12-15 Minutes | Intensity: High)

1. Preheat: Preheat your Air Fryer to 380°F (193°C) for 3 minutes.

2. Prepare Basket: Lightly spray the air fryer basket with cooking oil to prevent sticking.

3. Arrange: Place the broccoli bites in a single layer in the basket. Do not overcrowd them; cook in batches if necessary to ensure crispiness.

4. Spray: Lightly spray the tops of the bites with cooking oil. This helps them brown and

crisp up.

5. Cook: Air fry at 380°F (193°C) for 8 minutes.

6. Flip: Open the basket and flip the bites carefully with tongs. Spray the other side lightly.

7. Finish: Cook for another 3 to 5 minutes until they are golden brown and crispy.

8. Serve: Remove from the air fryer and let them rest on a paper towel for 1 minute before serving.

Flavor Variations

- Spicy Kick: Add ¼ teaspoon of cayenne pepper or red pepper flakes to the broccoli mixture.

- Italian Style: Swap the smoked paprika for Italian seasoning and serve with marinara sauce.

- Low Carb: Skip the flour and Panko coating. Simply form the patties and air fry them directly (they will be softer but still delicious).

- Bacon Lover: Add ¼ cup of crumbled, cooked bacon to the broccoli mixture.

Nutrition

Note: Nutritional information is an estimate based on standard ingredients and does not include dipping sauces.

Serving Size: 4 bites
Calories: 285
Total Fat: 15g
Saturated Fat: 8g
Cholesterol: 115mg
Sodium: 620mg
Total Carbohydrates: 20g
Dietary Fiber: 3g
Sugars: 2g
Protein: 16g