Prep Time: 15 minutes
Cook Time: 15 minutes
Total Time: 30 minutes
Servings: 2
Calories: ~520 kcal per serving

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Why You'll Love This Bowl

If you love the fresh, vibrant flavors of a classic Caprese salad—ripe tomatoes, creamy mozzarella, and fragrant basil—but need something a little more substantial to get you

through the day, this Chicken Caprese Protein Bowl is exactly what you are looking for. It takes all the beloved elements of the Italian antipasto and transforms them into a complete, satisfying meal. Juicy, golden-seared chicken breast is sliced and piled over a bed of fluffy quinoa (or your grain of choice), then topped with sweet cherry tomatoes, creamy mozzarella pearls, and a shower of fresh basil. A drizzle of balsamic glaze ties everything together with a sweet-tart finish. It is high in protein, naturally gluten-free, endlessly meal-prep friendly, and comes together in just 30 minutes. Perfect for a quick weeknight dinner or a bright, make-ahead lunch.

Ingredients

For the Chicken

- 2 medium boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about 6 oz / 170g each)
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- ½ tsp smoked paprika
- Salt and black pepper to taste

For the Bowl Base

- 1 cup dry quinoa, rinsed (or 2 cups cooked brown rice, farro, or orzo)
- 2 cups water or low-sodium chicken broth (for cooking quinoa)
- 2 cups fresh cherry or grape tomatoes, halved
- 8 oz (225g) fresh mozzarella pearls (bocconcini), drained
- ½ cup fresh basil leaves, torn or roughly chopped
- 1 small English cucumber, diced (optional, for crunch)
- 2 cups fresh arugula or baby spinach (optional, for greens)

For the Balsamic Dressing

- 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard

- 1 tsp honey or maple syrup
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- Pinch of salt and black pepper

For the Garnish

- Balsamic glaze (store-bought or homemade reduction)
- Fresh basil leaves
- Flaky sea salt

Equipment Needed

- Small saucepan (for quinoa)
- Large skillet or grill pan (for chicken)
- Small jar or bowl (for dressing)

- Cutting board and chef’s knife
- Meat thermometer (recommended)
- Meal prep containers (optional)

Instructions

Phase 1: Cook the Quinoa (Time: 15 mins | Intensity: Low)

1. Rinse the Quinoa: Place the dry quinoa in a fine-mesh strainer and rinse under cold water for 30 seconds. This removes the natural saponin coating, which can taste bitter.
2. Cook: In a small saucepan, combine the rinsed quinoa and water (or broth). Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for 12–15 minutes, until the quinoa is tender and the liquid is absorbed.
3. Fluff & Rest: Remove from the heat and let it sit covered for 5 minutes. Fluff with a fork and set aside to cool slightly. *Note: You can cook the quinoa while you prepare the chicken in the next phase.*

Phase 2: Sear the Chicken (Time: 12 mins | Intensity: High)

1. Prep the Chicken: Pat the chicken breasts completely dry with paper towels—this is

essential for a good sear. Season both sides generously with oregano, garlic powder, smoked paprika, salt, and black pepper.

2. Heat the Pan: Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat until it shimmers.

3. Sear: Carefully place the chicken breasts in the pan. Sear for 5–6 minutes per side without moving them, until golden brown and cooked through. The internal temperature should reach 165°F (74°C).

4. Rest: Transfer the chicken to a cutting board and let it rest for 5 minutes before slicing. Resting allows the juices to redistribute, keeping the meat moist. Slice against the grain into thick strips.

Phase 3: Make the Dressing (Time: 3 mins | Intensity: Low)

1. Combine: In a small jar or bowl, combine the extra-virgin olive oil, balsamic vinegar, Dijon mustard, honey, minced garlic, salt, and pepper.

2. Emulsify: Seal the jar and shake vigorously for 20–30 seconds, or whisk the ingredients in a bowl until the dressing is smooth and slightly thickened.

Phase 4: Assemble the Bowl (Time: 5 mins | Intensity: Low)

1. Base Layer: Divide the cooked quinoa between two large bowls. If using greens, lay a bed of arugula or spinach over the quinoa.

2. Add Vegetables: Arrange the halved cherry tomatoes and diced cucumber (if using) around the bowl.

3. Add Chicken: Place the sliced chicken on one side of the bowl.

4. Add Mozzarella: Nestle the mozzarella pearls into the bowl, alternating with the tomatoes.

5. Dress: Drizzle the balsamic dressing generously over the entire bowl. Finish with a drizzle of thick balsamic glaze.

6. Garnish: Scatter the fresh basil leaves over the top and finish with a pinch of flaky sea salt. Serve immediately.

Phase 5: Meal Prep Variation (Optional)

1. Store: Divide the ingredients into airtight meal prep containers, keeping the dressing and balsamic glaze separate.

2. Reheat: When ready to eat, reheat the chicken and quinoa in the microwave for 1–2 minutes. Add the fresh mozzarella, tomatoes, basil, and dressing after reheating to maintain freshness.

Intensity & Timing Guide (At a Glance)

Phase	Task	Time	Intensity Level
Phase 1	Cooking quinoa	15 mins	Low (Hands-off)
Phase 2	Searing chicken	12 mins	High (Active focus needed)
Phase 3	Making dressing	3 mins	Low (Quick shake)
Phase 4	Assembling bowls	5 mins	Low (Relaxed)
Phase 5	Meal prep storage	5 mins	Low (Optional)

Recipe Notes & Tips

- Chicken Alternatives: This recipe works beautifully with grilled shrimp, salmon, or even sliced steak. For a vegetarian version, swap the chicken for grilled halloumi or crispy chickpeas.

- The Perfect Sear: The key to juicy chicken is a hot pan and dry meat. Do not crowd the pan—if the chicken breasts are large, cook them one at a time. Overcrowding steams the meat instead of searing it.

- Quinoa Cooking Ratio: The standard ratio for quinoa is 1 part quinoa to 2 parts liquid. If you prefer a fluffier texture, use slightly less liquid (1¾ cups) and let it steam longer.

- Balsamic Glaze: To make your own glaze, simmer ½ cup of balsamic vinegar with 1 tablespoon of honey in a small saucepan over medium heat for 8–10 minutes, until it reduces by half and coats the back of a spoon. Watch it carefully—it burns quickly.

- Make It Ahead: The chicken, quinoa, and dressing can all be prepared up to 3 days in

advance. Store them separately in the refrigerator and assemble the bowls just before serving.

- Storage: Store assembled bowls (without dressing) in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 3 days. Keep the dressing separate to prevent the quinoa from becoming soggy.

Nutrition Facts (Estimated)

Based on 2 servings (including quinoa, chicken, mozzarella, tomatoes, and dressing). Nutritional values are estimates and will vary based on specific ingredients used.

- Calories: 520 kcal
- Total Fat: 22g (Saturated Fat: 8g)
- Cholesterol: 105mg
- Sodium: 480mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 38g (Dietary Fiber: 5g, Sugars: 9g)
- Protein: 42g

- Vitamin A: 15% DV
- Vitamin C: 20% DV
- Calcium: 25% DV
- Iron: 20% DV