- Prep time: 20 minutes
- Cook time: 30–35 minutes
- Total time: 50–55 minutes
- Yield: 6–8 servings
- Category: Dinner, Casserole, Family Meal
- Cuisine: American-French fusion

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Ingredients

For the Filling

- 3 cups cooked chicken, shredded or cubed (about 1½ lbs / 680 g raw chicken breast, or use rotisserie chicken for speed)
- 8 oz (225 g) cooked ham, diced into ½-inch cubes
- 8 oz (225 g) Swiss cheese, shredded (about 2 cups), divided
- 8 oz (225 g) cream cheese, softened to room temperature
- 1 cup whole milk (or half-and-half for a richer sauce)
- ¾ cup sour cream
- 2 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tbsp all-purpose flour (for thickening)

- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ tsp onion powder
- ½ tsp dried thyme
- ¼ tsp freshly ground black pepper
- Pinch of salt (taste first — ham and cheese are salty)

For the Crunchy Topping

- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs
- ⅓ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 4 tbsp unsalted butter, melted
- ½ tsp garlic powder
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh parsley (or 1 tsp dried)

Equipment

- 9×13-inch (23×33 cm) baking dish
- Large mixing bowl
- Whisk
- Small saucepan (optional, for warming the sauce)
- Spatula
- Aluminum foil

Instructions

Phase 1: Oven Preheating & Ingredient Prep (Intensity: Low | Time: 5 minutes)

1. Preheat the Oven: Set your oven to 375°F (190°C) and position a rack in the center. A properly preheated oven is essential for even cooking and a crust that browns without burning.

2. Prepare the Baking Dish: Lightly grease your 9×13-inch baking dish with butter or non-stick spray. This guarantees clean serving portions and easy cleanup later.

3. Gather the Components: If using raw chicken, poach or bake it until cooked through (about 15–18 minutes at 375°F / 190°C), then shred it. If using rotisserie chicken, simply pull the meat and set aside. Dice the ham and shred the Swiss cheese, keeping about ½ cup of cheese reserved for the topping layer. Intensity: Low — this is straightforward, unhurried prep work.

Phase 2: Building the Creamy Sauce (Intensity: Medium | Time: 7–8 minutes)

4. Soften the Cream Cheese: In your large mixing bowl, beat the softened cream cheese with a whisk until smooth and lump-free. Starting with truly soft cream cheese is critical — cold cream cheese will leave lumps in the sauce that no amount of whisking can fix.

5. Add the Wet Ingredients: Whisk in the milk, sour cream, and Dijon mustard until the mixture is silky and fully combined. Add the minced garlic, onion powder, dried thyme, black pepper, and a cautious pinch of salt. Remember that ham and Swiss are naturally salty, so undersalt now and adjust later.

6. Thicken the Sauce: Sprinkle the flour over the mixture and whisk vigorously for 30 seconds to incorporate. The flour will thicken the sauce as it bakes, preventing a watery casserole. Intensity: Medium — keep whisking steadily; this step needs your attention to avoid lumps.

Phase 3: Assembling the Casserole (Intensity: Low | Time: 5 minutes)

7. Combine the Filling: Fold the shredded chicken, diced ham, and about 1½ cups of the shredded Swiss cheese into the creamy sauce. Stir gently with a spatula until every piece of chicken and ham is coated. Taste a small spoonful and adjust the seasoning — this is your last chance to correct it before baking.

8. Transfer to the Dish: Spread the mixture evenly into the prepared baking dish, pressing it into the corners with your spatula so the casserole bakes uniformly. A level surface also helps the topping brown evenly.

Phase 4: The Crunchy Topping (Intensity: Low | Time: 3 minutes)

9. Make the Crumb Mixture: In a small bowl, combine the panko breadcrumbs, grated Parmesan, garlic powder, and chopped parsley. Pour the melted butter over the top and toss with a fork until the crumbs are evenly moistened and clumpy. Panko is key here — its larger, airier flakes create a shatteringly crisp crust that regular breadcrumbs can’t match.

10. Top the Casserole: Sprinkle the reserved ½ cup of Swiss cheese over the filling first, then scatter the buttery crumb mixture evenly across the entire surface. Don’t press the crumbs down — leaving them loose and mounded encourages maximum crunch.

Phase 5: Baking & Resting (Intensity: Medium | Time: 30–35

minutes)

11. Bake Covered: Cover the dish with aluminum foil and bake for 20 minutes at 375°F (190°C). The foil traps steam, ensuring the filling heats through and the cheese melts without the topping scorching prematurely.

12. Bake Uncovered: Remove the foil and continue baking for 10–15 minutes, until the topping is deep golden brown and the filling is bubbling at the edges. Intensity: Medium — check the casserole at the 8-minute mark; if the topping is browning too quickly, tent it loosely with foil. Every oven runs differently, so visual cues matter more than the clock here.

13. Rest Before Serving: Remove the casserole from the oven and let it rest for 5–10 minutes before serving. This is not optional — resting allows the sauce to set, so portions hold their shape instead of running across the plate. Intensity: Low — walk away and let it settle.

Phase 6: Serving & Garnish (Intensity: Low | Time: 2 minutes)

14. Garnish and Plate: Sprinkle with additional fresh parsley for color. Serve hot alongside steamed green beans, a crisp Caesar salad, or crusty bread to soak up the sauce.

Timing & Intensity Summary

Phase	Task	Intensity	Time
1	Preheat & prep ingredients	Low	5 min
2	Build creamy sauce	Medium	7–8 min
3	Assemble casserole	Low	5 min
4	Make crumb topping	Low	3 min
5	Bake covered, then uncovered + rest	Medium	30–35 min + 5–10 min rest
6	Garnish & serve	Low	2 min
—	Total	—	~50–55 min

Recipe Notes & Variations

- Make-Ahead: Assemble the casserole through Phase 4, cover, and refrigerate up to 24 hours. Add 5–10 minutes to the covered baking time since it starts cold.

- Freezer-Friendly: Freeze the unbaked casserole (without the crumb topping) for up to 3 months. Thaw overnight in the fridge, add the topping fresh, and bake as directed.

- Chicken Thighs: Boneless, skinless thighs work beautifully and stay extra juicy — shred them the same way.

- Broccoli Addition: Fold 2 cups of steamed broccoli florets into the filling for a complete one-dish meal.

- Cheese Swaps: Gruyère or Jarlsberg can replace Swiss for a nuttier flavor; smoked Gouda adds a wonderful depth.

- Crispier Top: For an even shatter-proof crust, broil the uncovered casserole for the final

1–2 minutes — watch it constantly, as broilers go from golden to burnt in seconds.

Nutrition Information (Estimated per serving, based on 8 servings)

Please note these values are estimates and will vary based on specific ingredients, brands, and portion sizes.

- Calories: 485 kcal
- Total Fat: 31g
- Saturated Fat: 17g
- Cholesterol: 135mg
- Sodium: 890mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 14g
- Dietary Fiber: 1g
- Total Sugars: 4g

- Protein: 36g