Prep Time	15 minutes
Cook Time	10–12 minutes (per batch)
Total Time	30 minutes
Intensity Level	Easy–Moderate (light chopping, shaping)
Servings	4 (makes about 16 bites)
Equipment	Air fryer, mixing bowls, steamer or microwave

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Why You’ll Love This Recipe

Broccoli and cheese is a classic pairing for good reason — earthy, slightly sweet broccoli balances rich, salty cheese beautifully. These bites take that combination and wrap it in a crispy golden shell, all without deep frying. The air fryer does the heavy lifting, circulating hot air to create a crunch that rivals anything from a fryer basket, using a fraction of the oil. They’re perfect as a party appetizer, a game-day snack, a lunchbox filler, or a clever way to

get greens into reluctant eaters. Best of all, they freeze beautifully, so you can make a double batch and have homemade snacks on standby.

Ingredients

For the bites:

- 1 large head of broccoli (about 12 oz / 340 g), or 3 cups of small florets
- 1½ cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese (about 6 oz / 170 g)
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs, divided
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon onion powder
- ¼ teaspoon smoked paprika
- ¼ teaspoon salt

- ¼ teaspoon black pepper
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh chives or parsley (optional)

For the coating station:

- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 egg, beaten with 1 tablespoon water
- 1 cup panko breadcrumbs

For serving (optional):

- Marinara sauce, ranch dressing, or a yogurt-garlic dip

For the air fryer:

- Olive oil or avocado oil spray

Instructions

Step 1: Prepare the Broccoli (5 minutes)

Steam the broccoli florets until tender, about 4–5 minutes in a steamer basket over boiling water, or 3 minutes in a microwave-safe bowl with a splash of water, covered. The broccoli should be soft enough to mash but not waterlogged. Transfer to a colander and press gently with a paper towel to remove excess moisture. This step is critical — wet broccoli will make the mixture soggy and the bites won't hold together.

Step 2: Chop Finely (2 minutes)

Once the broccoli is cool enough to handle, chop it very finely — you want pieces roughly the size of rice grains, not a purée. You can also pulse it a few times in a food processor, but be careful not to over-process. You should have about 1½ packed cups of finely chopped broccoli.

Step 3: Build the Mixture (3 minutes)

In a large bowl, combine the chopped broccoli, shredded cheddar, Parmesan, ½ cup of the panko, the beaten eggs, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, salt, pepper, and herbs. Mix with a spatula or your hands until everything is evenly distributed. The mixture should hold together when squeezed. If it feels too wet, add 1–2 tablespoons more panko; if too dry, add a teaspoon of water.

Step 4: Shape the Bites (5 minutes)

Scoop about 1½ tablespoons of the mixture and roll it into a compact ball, then flatten slightly into a small patty about 1½ inches wide and ¾ inch thick. Press firmly so the bites don't fall apart. Repeat with the remaining mixture — you should get 16 bites. Set them on a parchment-lined tray as you go.

Step 5: Set Up the Coating Station (2 minutes)

Arrange three shallow dishes: one with flour, one with the egg-water mixture, and one with the remaining 1 cup of panko. Working one at a time, roll each bite in flour (shake off excess), dip in egg, then coat generously in panko, pressing the crumbs on so they adhere.

Step 6: Air Fry (10–12 minutes)

Preheat the air fryer to 390°F (200°C) for 3 minutes. Lightly spray the basket with oil. Arrange the bites in a single layer with a little space between them — do not overcrowd, or they'll steam instead of crisp. Work in batches if needed. Spray the tops of the bites lightly with oil. Air fry for 10–12 minutes, flipping halfway through, until the coating is deep golden brown and crispy. Cooking time varies by air fryer model — start checking at 9 minutes.

Step 7: Rest and Serve (2 minutes)

Let the bites rest for 2 minutes before serving — the cheese inside is molten and needs a moment to settle. Serve warm with marinara, ranch, or a garlic yogurt dip.

Time and Intensity Guide

Phase	Time	Intensity
Prep (steps 1–5)	15 min	Easy–Moderate
Air frying (per batch)	10–12 min	Hands-off (one flip)
Resting	2 min	None
Total	~30 min	Easy–Moderate

Make-ahead: Shape and coat the bites up to 24 hours ahead; refrigerate in a single layer, covered. Freezer option: Freeze coated, uncooked bites on a tray, then transfer to a bag. Air fry from frozen at 380°F (195°C) for 14–16 minutes, flipping halfway.

Nutrition (per serving, 4 bites, of 4 servings)

Estimates based on standard ingredients; values vary by brand and portion size.

- Calories: ~310 kcal
- Total Fat: 16 g (Saturated: 8 g)
- Cholesterol: 115 mg
- Sodium: 610 mg
- Total Carbohydrates: 22 g (Fiber: 3 g; Sugars: 2 g)
- Protein: 17 g