

Prep Time: 15 minutes | Cook Time: 10 minutes | Total Time: 25 minutes | Yield: 4 servings |
Skill Level: Easy | Spice Level: Mild

Indulge in all the iconic, mouthwatering flavors of America's favorite fast-food burger without the heavy bun or the drive-thru line. This Easy Big Mac Salad—often called the ultimate Big Mac in a bowl—combines perfectly seasoned, seared ground beef, crisp iceberg lettuce, sharp cheddar, zesty dill pickles, and a low-carb, homemade copycat Special Sauce that tastes identical to the original.

Whether you are following a low-carb or keto lifestyle, prepping high-protein lunches for the week, or simply looking for a quick 25-minute weeknight dinner that the entire family will devour, this recipe hits every mark.

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Ingredients

For the Copycat Big Mac Special Sauce

- Mayonnaise: 1/2 cup (full-fat for maximum richness)
- Dill Pickle Relish: 2 tablespoons (finely chopped)
- Yellow Mustard: 1 tablespoon
- White Vinegar: 1 teaspoon
- Paprika: 1 teaspoon (sweet or smoked)
- Garlic Powder: 1/2 teaspoon
- Onion Powder: 1/2 teaspoon
- Fine Sea Salt: 1/4 teaspoon

For the Burger & Salad Base

- Ground Beef: 1.5 lbs (80/20 or 85/15 ground chuck works best for flavor)
- Yellow Onion: 1 small, finely diced (divided: half for cooking, half for fresh topping)

- Garlic Powder: 1/2 teaspoon
- Salt & Black Pepper: To taste (approx. 1/2 teaspoon each)
- Iceberg Lettuce: 1 large head, washed, dried, and shredded (or chopped finely)
- Cheddar Cheese: 1 cup shredded (sharp yellow cheddar provides authentic flavor)
- Dill Pickle Slices: 1/2 cup, roughly chopped
- Sesame Seeds: 1 tablespoon, toasted (for garnish)

Equipment Needed

- Large skillet (cast iron or stainless steel preferred)
- Large salad bowl & individual serving bowls
- Small mixing bowl & whisk
- Meat chopper or wooden spoon

Detailed Step-by-Step Instructions

Step 1: Whisk the Secret Special Sauce

1. In a small mixing bowl, combine the mayonnaise, dill pickle relish, yellow mustard, white vinegar, paprika, garlic powder, onion powder, and fine sea salt.
2. Whisk vigorously until smooth, creamy, and completely uniform in color.
3. Taste and adjust seasoning if desired. Cover the bowl and set it in the refrigerator while preparing the rest of the meal. *Pro Tip: Making the dressing an hour in advance allows the flavors to meld together into that classic signature taste.*

Step 2: Sear and Season the Beef

1. Place a large skillet over medium-high heat (heat intensity: high/sear). Allow the pan to get hot before adding the meat.
2. Add the ground beef and half of the finely diced yellow onion to the hot skillet.
3. Break the meat apart using a wooden spoon or meat chopper into bite-sized crumbles.
4. Season generously with garlic powder, salt, and freshly cracked black pepper.
5. Savor the sizzle for 6 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the beef is fully browned and cooked through with crispy, caramelized edges.

6. Once cooked, remove the skillet from heat. Tilt the pan and carefully drain off excess grease, leaving just enough moisture to keep the meat juicy. Allow the beef to cool slightly for 3-5 minutes so it doesn't immediately wilt the fresh lettuce.

Step 3: Assemble the Salad Bowls

1. Divide the crisp, shredded iceberg lettuce evenly among four large dinner bowls (or spread it across a large family-style serving platter).
2. Spoon a generous portion of the warm, seasoned ground beef right over the bed of lettuce.
3. Sprinkle shredded sharp cheddar cheese directly over the warm beef so it gets slightly melty and soft.
4. Top each bowl with the remaining fresh diced onions and chopped dill pickle slices.

Step 4: Garnish, Drizzle, and Serve

1. Drizzle the homemade Big Mac Special Sauce generously over each salad bowl.
2. Finish with a sprinkle of toasted sesame seeds over the top for that classic sesame seed bun look and a delightful nuttiness.
3. Serve immediately while the beef is warm and the lettuce is crisp!

Chef's Cooking Intensities & Timing Summary

To help you manage heat levels and prep speed, use this heat-intensity roadmap:

Cooking Stage	Heat / Intensity Level	Time Duration	Key Action
Sauce Prep	Low / Manual Prep	5 minutes	Whisk until emulsified; chill in fridge.
Pan Heating	High Heat	2 minutes	Preheat dry skillet until lightly smoking.
Searing Beef	Medium-High Heat	6-8 minutes	Caramelize meat crumbles & onions.
Resting Meat	Off Heat / Ambient	3-5 minutes	Cool slightly to prevent wilting lettuce.
Assembly	Low / Manual Prep	5 minutes	Layer lettuce, beef, cheese, pickles & sauce.

Storage & Meal Prep Instructions

- Meal Prep / Storage: Store the cooked beef, chopped veggies, and Special Sauce in separate airtight containers in the refrigerator. The beef and sauce will stay fresh for up to 4 days.
- To Serve Cold: Assemble directly from the fridge for a quick cold lunch.
- To Serve Warm: Reheat only the ground beef in the microwave or skillet for 45 seconds, then layer over fresh cold lettuce, cheese, toppings, and cold dressing.

Variations & Substitutions

- Leaner Option: Swap the ground beef for ground turkey, ground chicken, or extra-lean 90/10 beef.

- Dairy-Free / Vegan Adaptation: Use plant-based ground meat, dairy-free vegan mayonnaise, and dairy-free cheddar shreds.
- Extra Crunch: Toss in diced plum tomatoes, shredded red cabbage, or crinkled bacon bits for a Bacon Big Mac bowl.

Nutritional Information (Per Serving)

Serving Size: 1 fully assembled salad bowl with dressing (Recipe makes 4 servings)

Nutrient	Amount Per Serving	% Daily Value*
Calories	520 kcal	—
Total Fat	42 g	54%
<i>Saturated Fat</i>	<i>14 g</i>	<i>70%</i>
<i>Trans Fat</i>	<i>1 g</i>	—
Cholesterol	110 mg	37%
Sodium	780 mg	34%
Total Carbohydrates	7 g	3%
<i>Dietary Fiber</i>	<i>2 g</i>	<i>7%</i>
<i>Total Sugars</i>	<i>3 g</i>	—
Net Carbohydrates	5 g	—
Protein	31 g	62%
Vitamin D	0.4 mcg	2%
Calcium	220 mg	17%
Iron	3.8 mg	21%
Potassium	480 mg	10%