

- Prep Time: 15 minutes
- Cook Time: 45 minutes
- Total Time: 1 hour
- Yield: 8 servings
- Cooking Method: Oven Bake
- Difficulty Level: Easy
- Intensity Level: Low-Medium (*Simple stove-to-oven workflow with minimal active prep*)

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## Equipment Needed

- Large skillet (12-inch)
- 9×13-inch baking dish
- Whisk and wooden spoon
- Mixing bowl
- Measuring cups and spoons

## Ingredients

### Meat & Base Layer

- 1.5 lbs (680g) Lean Ground Beef (*85/15 recommended for optimal flavor*)

- 1 medium Yellow Onion, finely diced
- 3 cloves Garlic, minced
- 1 tsp Salt
- ½ tsp Black Pepper, freshly cracked
- 1 tsp Onion Powder
- 1 tsp Garlic Powder
- 1 tsp Italian Seasoning
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

## **Potato & Sauce Layer**

- 30 oz (850g) Shredded Hashbrowns (*frozen, thawed, and patted dry*)
- 10.5 oz (298g) Condensed Cream of Mushroom Soup (*or Cream of Chicken*)
- 8 oz (225g) Sour Cream

- ½ cup (120ml) Whole Milk
- 2 cups (200g) Sharp Cheddar Cheese, freshly shredded (*divided*)
- 1 cup (100g) Monterey Jack or Mozzarella Cheese, shredded

## Garnish & Optional Toppings

- 2 tbsp Fresh Parsley, chopped
- 3 slices Cooked Bacon, crumbled (*optional crunch*)
- 2 Green Onions, thinly sliced

## Intensity & Timing Matrix

| Phase                   | Active / Passive | Heat / Power  | Time      | Key Focus                                                 |
|-------------------------|------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| Phase 1: Prep & Preheat | Active           | High          | 5 mins    | Oven heating; thaw and pat hashbrowns thoroughly dry.     |
| Phase 2: Beef Searing   | Active           | Medium-High   | 8-10 mins | Brown meat, soften onions, and render fat.                |
| Phase 3: Sauce Whisking | Active           | Room Temp     | 5 mins    | Blend wet base until fully smooth and lump-free.          |
| Phase 4: Assembly       | Active           | None          | 5 mins    | Fold ingredients together without over-crushing potatoes. |
| Phase 5: Covered Bake   | Passive          | 375°F (190°C) | 30 mins   | Melt cheeses, soften hashbrowns, and fuse flavors.        |

| Phase                    | Active /<br>Passive | Heat / Power  | Time    | Key Focus                                        |
|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Phase 6: Uncovered Crisp | Passive             | 375°F (190°C) | 15 mins | Develop a deep golden-brown cheese crust on top. |
| Phase 7: Rest & Set      | Passive             | Off           | 10 mins | Allow sauce to settle for perfect slicing.       |

## Step-by-Step Instructions

### Step 1: Prep the Oven and Pan

1. Preheat your oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. Lightly grease a 9×13-inch baking dish with non-stick cooking spray or a thin brush of olive oil.
3. Spread out the thawed hashbrowns on a clean paper towel and press down firmly to extract surplus moisture. *Removing excess water prevents a soggy bake.*

### Step 2: Brown the Ground Beef

1. Heat a large 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat.
2. Add the ground beef and diced yellow onion. Cook for 6 to 8 minutes, breaking up the beef with a wooden spoon until browned and no pink remains.
3. Drain away excess grease, leaving about 1 tablespoon in the skillet for moisture.

4. Reduce heat to medium-low. Add minced garlic, salt, black pepper, onion powder, garlic powder, Italian seasoning, and Worcestershire sauce.
5. Stir continuously for 1 to 2 minutes until the garlic becomes fragrant. Remove skillet from heat and set aside.

### **Step 3: Mix the Creamy Sauce**

1. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together condensed cream of mushroom soup, sour cream, and whole milk until completely smooth.
2. Fold in 1 cup of Sharp Cheddar and ½ cup of Monterey Jack cheese.

### **Step 4: Combine Hashbrowns and Beef**

1. Add the thawed, dried hashbrowns and cooked ground beef mixture directly into the bowl with the creamy cheese sauce.
2. Fold everything gently using a rubber spatula until the potatoes and meat are evenly coated in sauce.

### **Step 5: Assemble and Bake**

1. Transfer the casserole mixture into your prepared 9×13-inch baking dish. Use a spatula to press it gently into an even layer.

2. Cover the dish tightly with aluminum foil.
3. Bake in the middle rack of your preheated oven at 375°F (190°C) for 30 minutes (Intensity: Medium-Low, sealed bake).

## **Step 6: Top and Golden-Crisp**

1. Carefully remove the aluminum foil.
2. Evenly sprinkle the remaining 1 cup of Sharp Cheddar and ½ cup of Monterey Jack over the top. If using crumbled bacon, scatter it on top now.
3. Return the dish to the oven uncovered and bake for an additional 15 minutes (Intensity: Medium), until the cheese is melted, bubbling around the edges, and light golden brown.

## **Step 7: Rest and Serve**

1. Remove from the oven and let the casserole rest for 10 minutes at room temperature.  
*This step lets the starch structure set, ensuring neat square portions when cut.*
2. Garnish with chopped fresh parsley and sliced green onions. Cut into 8 equal slices and serve warm.

## Expert Tips for Success

- **Moisture Control:** Thawing and drying your hashbrowns is the single most critical step. Cold or damp potatoes lower oven temperatures and turn the sauce watery.
- **Cheese Selection:** Block cheese shredded at home melts drastically better than pre-bagged shredded cheese, which contains anti-caking agents that hinder smoothness.
- **Make-Ahead Friendly:** Assemble the entire casserole (up to Step 5) the night before, cover tightly with foil, and store in the refrigerator. When baking straight from the fridge, add 10–15 minutes to the covered bake time.

## Storage, Freezing & Reheating

- **Refrigeration:** Store leftover portions in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 4 days.
- **Freezing:** You can freeze the baked or unbaked casserole for up to 3 months. Wrap tightly with plastic wrap and aluminum foil. Thaw completely in the refrigerator overnight before baking.
- **Reheating:** Reheat individual portions in the microwave for 1.5–2 minutes, or warm the whole casserole covered in a 350°F (175°C) oven for 20 minutes until piping hot.

# Nutritional Information

Serving Size: 1/8th of casserole (approx. 240g)

Servings Per Recipe: 8

| Nutritive Metric     | Amount Per Serving | % Daily Value* |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Calories             | 485 kcal           | —              |
| Total Fat            | 29g                | 37%            |
| <i>Saturated Fat</i> | <i>14g</i>         | 70%            |
| <i>Trans Fat</i>     | <i>1g</i>          | —              |
| Cholesterol          | 95mg               | 32%            |
| Sodium               | 840mg              | 37%            |
| Total Carbohydrates  | 31g                | 11%            |
| <i>Dietary Fiber</i> | <i>3g</i>          | 11%            |
| <i>Total Sugars</i>  | <i>3g</i>          | —              |
| Protein              | 26g                | 52%            |
| Vitamin D            | 0.4mcg             | 2%             |
| Calcium              | 310mg              | 24%            |
| Iron                 | 2.8mg              | 15%            |
| Potassium            | 520mg              | 11%            |