

- Prep time: 15 minutes
 - Cook time: 45-50 minutes
 - Total time: 1 hour 5 minutes
 - Yield: 6-8 servings
 - Category: Main Course, Casserole
 - Cuisine: American (Midwestern)
 - Intensity Level: Easy
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Ingredients

- For the Meat Mixture:

- 1 lb (450g) ground beef (80/20 blend recommended for flavor)

- 1 medium yellow onion, finely diced

- 2 cloves garlic, minced

- 1 teaspoon salt

- ½ teaspoon black pepper

- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce (optional, for depth of flavor)

- For the Creamy Sauce:

- 1 (10.5 oz / 298g) can condensed cream of mushroom soup

- 1 (10.5 oz / 298g) can condensed cream of chicken soup (or use two cans of mushroom soup)

- ½ cup (120ml) whole milk

- 1 cup (115g) frozen mixed vegetables (peas, carrots, corn), thawed (optional, but a great way to add veggies)
 - For the Layers:
 - 2 cups (about 8 oz / 225g) shredded cheddar cheese, divided
 - 1 (32 oz / 907g) bag frozen tater tots
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Instructions

Step 1: Preheat and Prep

1. Preheat your oven to 400°F (200°C) . Lightly grease a 9×13-inch (23×33 cm) baking dish with non-stick spray or a little butter.
2. If using, ensure your frozen mixed vegetables are thawed and drained of any excess water.

Step 2: Cook the Meat Mixture

1. In a large skillet over medium-high heat, add the ground beef and diced onion. Cook, breaking up the beef with a spoon, until it is browned and the onion is soft and translucent. This should take about 6-8 minutes.

2. Drain off any excess grease from the skillet.
3. Add the minced garlic, salt, pepper, and Worcestershire sauce (if using). Stir and cook for another minute until fragrant.
4. Remove the skillet from the heat.

Step 3: Create the Creamy Sauce

1. To the skillet with the cooked beef, add both cans of condensed soup and the milk. Stir everything together until well combined.
2. Fold in the thawed mixed vegetables (if using).
3. Stir in 1 cup of the shredded cheddar cheese until it just begins to melt into the mixture.

Step 4: Assemble the Casserole

1. Pour the entire beef and soup mixture into the prepared 9×13-inch baking dish, spreading it into an even layer.
2. Sprinkle the remaining 1 cup of shredded cheddar cheese evenly over the top of the meat mixture.

3. Arrange the frozen tater tots in a single, neat layer over the cheese. You can get creative here—line them up in rows or scatter them for a more rustic look.

Step 5: Bake to Perfection

1. Place the casserole, uncovered, in the preheated 400°F (200°C) oven.
2. Bake for 40-45 minutes, or until the tater tots are golden brown and crispy, and the filling is hot and bubbly around the edges.
3. Optional: For an extra-crispy top, you can broil the casserole for the last 1-2 minutes of baking. Watch it carefully so it doesn't burn!

Step 6: Rest and Serve

1. Carefully remove the casserole from the oven and let it rest on a wire rack for 5-10 minutes. This allows the filling to set slightly, making it easier to serve.
 2. Scoop onto plates and serve with your favorite sides, like a simple green salad or a dollop of ketchup for the tots!
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Recipe Notes & Variations

- **Make-Ahead:** You can assemble the casserole up to 24 hours in advance. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate. When ready to bake, remove from the fridge and let it sit at room temperature for 30 minutes before baking. You may need to add an extra 10-15 minutes to the baking time.
- **Cheese Variations:** Feel free to swap the cheddar for Colby Jack, Monterey Jack, or a spicy pepper jack for a kick.
- **Veggie Boost:** Finely diced bell peppers or mushrooms can be sautéed with the onions for extra flavor and nutrition.
- **Soupless Option:** If you're not a fan of condensed soups, you can make a simple béchamel sauce. Melt 3 tablespoons of butter, whisk in 3 tablespoons of flour, and cook for 1 minute. Gradually whisk in 1.5 cups of milk and cook until thickened. Season with salt, pepper, and a pinch of nutmeg.

Nutrition Information (Estimated)

Disclaimer: Nutritional information is an estimate and will vary based on the specific brands and ingredients used. This calculation is for 1 of 8 servings.

- **Calories:** ~450 kcal

- Protein: 22g
- Carbohydrates: 32g
- Fat: 26g
- Saturated Fat: 11g
- Cholesterol: 75mg
- Sodium: 950mg
- Fiber: 3g
- Sugar: 3g