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Mix up Your Macaroni

Pumpkin has long been a staple of fall. If your pumpkin latte consumption is borderline ridiculous, trade it in for a healthier fix. This pumpkin mac and cheese is rich in carotenoids, particularly alpha- and beta-carotene and just one serving provides 100% of your daily value of vitamin A. Each serving packs 17 g of protein and 4 g of fiber, yet it actually has fewer calories per serving than the 12 oz cup (yes, the regular size) of your favorite seasonal coffee beverage.

Pumpkin Mac and Cheese

Canola oil cooking spray
1/2 cup panko bread crumbs
1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided
1 Tbsp. canola oil
8 oz. whole-wheat rotelle pasta
1 cup low-fat (1%) milk
1 Tbsp. unsalted butter
1 Tbsp. all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cups (2 1/2 oz.) sharp light (50 percent) Cheddar cheese
1 cup canned unsweetened pumpkin
1/2 tsp. mustard powder
1/4 tsp. ground black pepper
Pinch of cayenne pepper
1/8 tsp. ground nutmeg, optional

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Coat 6cup baking dish with cooking spray and set aside.

To breadcrumbs, add 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese and toss to combine. Add oil and using your fingers, toss to coat breadcrumbs, then set mixture aside.

In large pot, boil 4 quarts of water. Add pasta and cook for 10 minutes, until slightly al dente. Drain in colander, and set aside.

While pasta cooks, in microwave or small saucepan, heat milk until it steams, and set aside.

In large saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Whisk in flour and cook for 1 minute, whisking slowly. Off heat, gradually add milk while whisking to avoid lumps. Return pot to medium-high heat and simmer sauce until it thickens to consistency of stirred yogurt, 3 minutes. Add cheese, remaining Parmesan cheese, pumpkin, mustard, black and cayenne peppers and nutmeg, if using, and stir until cheddar melts. Mix in cooked pasta. Spread mac and cheese in prepared baking dish. Sprinkle seasoned breadcrumbs over top.

Bake 15-20 minutes or until breadcrumbs are crisp and golden brown. Serve immediately.

Makes 6 servings.

Per serving: 289 calories, 9 g total fat (4 g saturated fat), 37 g carbohydrate, 17 g protein, 4 g dietary fiber, 307 mg sodium.