# Crusty Macaroni and Cheese

### [JULIA MOSKIN](https://cooking.nytimes.com/ourcooks/julia-moskin/my-recipes)

* **YIELD**8 to 12 servings
* **TIME**1 hour 15 minutes

Macaroni and cheese may seem an easy proposition. Noodles, cheese. But the secret to this creamy dish with a crunchy and crisp top is American cheese. This is no place for fancy cheeses or fancy noodles. Leave the whole-wheat penne and artisanal orecchiette in the cupboard and bring on the elbow pasta.

Featured in: [The Winter Cook; Macaroni And Lots Of Cheese](https://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/04/dining/arts/the-winter-cook-macaroni-and-lots-of-cheese.html).

INGREDIENTS

* **3** **tablespoons butter**
* **12** **ounces extra-sharp cheddar cheese, coarsely grated**
* **12** **ounces American cheese or cheddar cheese, coarsely grated**
* **1** **pound elbow pasta, boiled in salted water until just tender, drained, and rinsed under cold water**
* **⅛** **teaspoon cayenne (optional)**
* **Salt**
* **⅔** **cup whole milk.**

PREPARATION

1. Heat oven to 375 degrees. Use one tablespoon butter to thickly grease a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Combine grated cheeses and set aside two heaping cups for topping.
2. In a large bowl, toss together the pasta, cheeses, cayenne (if using) and salt to taste. Place in prepared pan and evenly pour milk over surface. Sprinkle reserved cheese on top, dot with remaining butter and bake, uncovered, 45 minutes. Raise heat to 400 degrees and bake 15 to 20 minutes more, until crusty on top and bottom.