Sunday Mac’ & Cheese Dinner⁠ (recipe serves 2 – 4)⁠ My favorite!

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Ingredients:

2 tablespoons unsalted butter⁠

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour ⠀⁠

2 cups whole milk, cold⠀⁠

¾ - 1 pound grated or small-diced cheese⁠ - have fun with different varieties!

¾ - 1 cup diced ham, crumbled bacon and/or cooked chicken

¾ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce⁠

½ teaspoon hot sauce or crushed red-pepper flakes (optional)⁠

¼ teaspoon mustard powder⁠

¼ teaspoon granulated garlic powder⁠

¼ teaspoon onion powder⁠

¼ teaspoon ground black pepper⁠

8 ounces (½ pound) pasta – I like to use rotini or penne ragati

½ cup panko breadcrumbs⠀⁠

¼ cup grated Italian cheese⁠

Oil/butter for a 2-quart baking dish.⠀⁠

⁠Preparation:

Melt butter on medium heat in heavy-bottomed, 3 – 4 quart pot/saucepan (do not let it brown).⁠ Add flour and whisk to form a paste. Continue to cook, stirring constantly, for about 1minute, then add the milk in a thin, steady stream while continuing to whisk until all lumps disappear and a smooth texture is achieved. Be sure to get into all corners of the pan!

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Cover and bring sauce up to a boil, then immediately turn it down and gently simmer for 15 – 20 minutes, stirring often to prevent burning. Sauce will gradually thicken.⁠

While the sauce simmers, boil the pasta according to package directions, taking it out of the water about 2 minutes early before it’s completely done (it will finish cooking in the oven).

Reduce sauce heat to low and, in ½-cup batches, slowly add the cheese to it while whisking continuously. A smooth, emulsified cheese sauce should begin to take form.⁠ Do not let the sauce come to a boil once the cheese is added (in fact, turn off the heat)!⁠ Whisk in the Worcestershire, hot sauce/pepper flakes, spices and meat until well-incorporated, then mix the pasta in well.⁠ Transfer the sauce/pasta mixture to baking dish, sprinkle grated cheese all over the surface, then top with an even layer of the breadcrumbs. Bake on middle rack at 350° F., uncovered, for about 45 minutes or until sauce is bubbly and the top is browned. Let it rest 15 minutes.

