Mac and Cheese with Sausage Meatballs

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Servings: 4

Kosher salt
12 ounces cavatappi or other corkscrew pasta
1 cup cheese crackers, crushed
2 1/4 cups whole milk
10 ounces bulk sweet Italian sausage
3 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, grated
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
8 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
2 ounces processed cheese (Velveeta), cut into 1/2-inch pieces
1/2 teaspoon Dijon mustard

Preparation Time: 35 minutes

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Set aside.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add the pasta and cook as the label directs for al dente. Reserve 1/2 cup of the cooking water, then drain. Reserve the pot.

Meanwhile, in a medium bowl,combine 1/2 cup of the crushed cheese crackers and 1/4 cup of milk. Let sit until slightly softened, about 10 minutes.

Add the sausage and two tablespoons of Parmesan. Mix well to combine. Form the sausage mixture into one-inch meatballs (about 28). Arrange on the prepared pan.

Bake until golden and cooked through, 6 to 8 minutes.

Add the flour and the remaining two cups of milk to the reserved pot. Whisk until smooth. Bring to a simmer over medium-high heat. Cook, whisking until slightly thickened, 8 to 10 minutes. Remove from the heat. Add the cheddar and processed cheese. Stir until smooth. Stir in 3/4 teaspoon of salt and the mustard.

Add the pasta and 1/4 cup of the reserved cooking water to the cheese sauce. Stir to coat. Add the meatballs. Stir to coat. Thin with the remaining 1/4 cup of cooking water, one tablespoon at a time, if needed.

In a small bowl, combine the remaining 1/2 cup of crushed cheese crackers and one tablespoon of Parmesan. Divide the mac and cheese among bowls. Sprinkle with the cracker mixture.