



Try the flavor of buffalo chicken wings without the chicken

By Melissa D'arabian

I've loved chicken wings since long before they were ever a cute little bar menu item, looking more like tiny drumsticks than an actual Z-shaped wing. My mom, a savvy penny-pinching college student when I was born, included chicken wings on our weekly dinner menu rotation throughout my childhood; fried chicken skin was practically a major food group. In college, when I discovered spicy, buttery buffalo wings, I was in pool-hall heaven. Now, as an adult, I still love all things buffalo-flavored. I'll pour spicy sauce straight from the bottle onto anything from roasted cauliflower to scrambled eggs. Meatballs, which are a big favorite around our house, are no exception.

Meatballs are an excellent family menu staple - I just swap out flavors according to our tastes (and pantry), and even make a bunch ahead of time to keep in the freezer for busy weeknights. They are also an ideal appetizer treat for events like movie night or watching Sunday football.

Turns out, baked meatballs are a great way to get both the flavor and fun of buffalo wings without the fried chicken skin derailing our nutritious eating. Lean ground beef is my favorite meat to use (96 percent lean beef offers over 20 grams of protein for fewer than 6 grams of fat per 4-ounce serving), but ground turkey also works great. Adding blue cheese and spicy buffalo sauce straight into the meatball means a complete visit to buffalo heaven all in one non-fried bite.

Try using a small ice-cream scoop to measure out even meatballs, and then bake on a parchment-lined baking sheet or in a mini-muffin pan sprayed with nonstick spray. Sometimes I dunk the cooked meatballs in extra sauce, rendering them too messy and spicy for my kiddos, but perfect for me, who doesn't mind going through multiple napkins in a sitting. But for the average meatball

eater watching the game, let's call swimming in sauce an optional, if delicious, step.

BUFFALO STYLE MEATBALLS

Ingredients

Servings: 10 servings, 2 meatballs each
 1 egg white
 3 tablespoons spicy buffalo sauce (like Frank's, or hot chili sauce)
 1 teaspoon smoked paprika
 1 1/2 teaspoon granulated garlic
 1 pound lean ground beef (95 percent lean)
 1/2 cup blue cheese crumbles
 1/2 cup whole wheat panko breadcrumbs (or plain breadcrumbs)
 1/4 teaspoon salt
 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
 Oil mister, or nonstick cooking spray

Preparation

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. and line a baking sheet with parchment paper. In a large bowl, use a fork to mix together the egg white, buffalo sauce, paprika, garlic and salt and pepper until blended. Add the beef and mix well with your hands. Then mix in the blue cheese and breadcrumbs. Let sit for 5 minutes. If mixture is too wet to form into balls, add in another tablespoon or two of breadcrumbs. Form the meat into golf-sized balls, and place on lined baking sheet. (Or use a mini-muffin pan sprayed with nonstick spray.) Spray the meatballs lightly with oil from the mister (or nonstick spray). Bake 15 minutes and then remove from the oven. Mix together the melted butter and buffalo sauce in a small bowl. Turn the meatballs, and brush with the basting sauce. Return to the oven until cooked through, about 5 more minutes. If desired, toss the meatballs in extra sauce in a large bowl (optional, but tasty and messy!). —AP