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School Dinner Heaven

Nostalgic Recipes That Take You Back

Harper North

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Dorothy Spooner asserts the moral right to
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Welcome to School Dinner Heaven!

As you read through these pages, you'll find a whole host of recipes that take you back to your school days while also offering a touch of modern flair, alternative cooking suggestions and handy, helpful tips for getting your dinners and lunches ready for school . . . or (sigh) work.

Almost every dish in this book can be served with a big portion of chips, a generous lashing of custard or an untrustworthy amount of gravy to get those nostalgia-laden taste buds excited!

So, get ready to don your apron, embrace your inner dinner lady, and whip up some canteen classics in your own kitchen that hark back to the good old days. Who knew that making **Sprinkle Cake**, **Corn Flake Tart**, **Veggie Burgers** or **Chicken, Leek and Mushroom Pie**, and so much more could be this therapeutic?

Whether you're a seasoned chef or a kitchen novice, these recipes have been designed to be fun, accessible and easy to achieve.

Don't worry, we've left out the 'mystery meat' pie so that you can enjoy the very best dishes from your school days. (Minus the teenage angst!)

General Notes:

- Fruits and Vegetables: Unless otherwise specified, assume all fruits and vegetables are medium-sized.
- Herbs: Use fresh herbs unless dried herbs are explicitly called for in the recipe.
- Eggs: Use free-range eggs.
- Milk: Use whole milk unless a different type is specified.

Store Cupboard Essentials

The ingredients listed below and illustrated on the next page are what you should aim to have in the kitchen to recreate these canteen classics.

Dairy

- butter (unsalted)
- milk (whole or semi-skimmed milk can be used for the majority of these recipes)
- eggs (medium-sized and free-range)
- pastry (ready-made puff and shortcrust pastry is fine to use)

Herbs and Spices

- herbs and spices: salt, pepper, thyme, rosemary, parsley, chilli, paprika, cumin, coriander, garam masala, ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, bay leaf, chilli flakes, cayenne pepper, basil

Sauces and Condiments

- honey
- jam
- mustard (multiple varieties)
- soy sauce (as stated)
- tomato purée
- Worcestershire sauce

Tins and Jars

- baked beans
- chopped tomatoes
- tinned tuna

Baking

- bicarbonate of soda
- chocolate (dark, milk, white)
- cocoa powder
- desiccated coconut
- digestive biscuits
- flour (self-raising, plain, cornflour)
- pink food colouring
- sprinkles
- sugar (caster, demerara)
- vanilla extract/essence

Kitchen Cupboard

- bread
- corn flakes
- dried noodles
- golden syrup
- oil (olive oil, vegetable)
- puffed rice
- rice
- stock cubes (chicken, lamb, beef)
- suet
- pasta

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Break-Time Bites

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Sausage Rolls

A timeless classic that is easy to make and perfect for any occasion, whether served warm or cold!

Makes 8 rolls

Preheat oven to 200°C/180°C fan/400°F/gas mark 6

Ingredients

- 1 x 320g packet of ready-made puff pastry
- 450g sausage meat or sausages with skins removed
- 1 beaten egg

Method

1. Roll out the pastry to roughly a 35cm x 30cm rectangle on a lightly floured work surface, trimming any uneven bits so that you have a neat edge. Cut the pastry lengthways in half so that you have two evenly shaped strips of pastry.
2. Add the sausage meat to a large bowl and stir through three tablespoons of cold water before mixing thoroughly. Once combined, remove the sausage meat and divide it into two long, skinless sausages that are roughly the same length as the pastry.
3. Pop each portion of sausage meat into the middle of a pastry strip, leaving enough pastry on either side of the meat. Brush each edge of pastry with the egg and fold one flap over the sausage before rolling it onto the other side and encasing the meat. Gently press any overlapping pastry together with the back of a fork for that classic crimped look.
4. Cut the sausage rolls into 1-inch lengths before placing onto a lined baking tray and transferring to the fridge for 30 minutes.
5. When you are ready to cook your sausage rolls, brush them with any remaining egg and bake in the oven for 30–35 minutes or until the pastry is a deep golden brown colour.
6. After the sausage rolls are cooked, transfer them to a wire rack and allow to cool for at least 10 minutes before scoffing them all.

TIPS

Sausages are often easier to find in the supermarket and many of them are pre-spiced, such as Cumberland, or have added ingredients like leek, caramelised onion or apple, which give these sausage rolls an added boost of flavour.

Spread a nice dollop of some good chutney down the centre of the pastry before adding the sausage meat and sprinkling the tops of the sausage rolls with ½ teaspoon of crushed fennel seeds and some rock salt for a more grown-up version of the break-time favourite.

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Posh Cheese on Toast

It's not that posh but it's also not your run of the mill, sad-looking cheese on toast from the canteen window – this is brilliant served with any of the soups on pages 20-24.

Serves 2

Ingredients

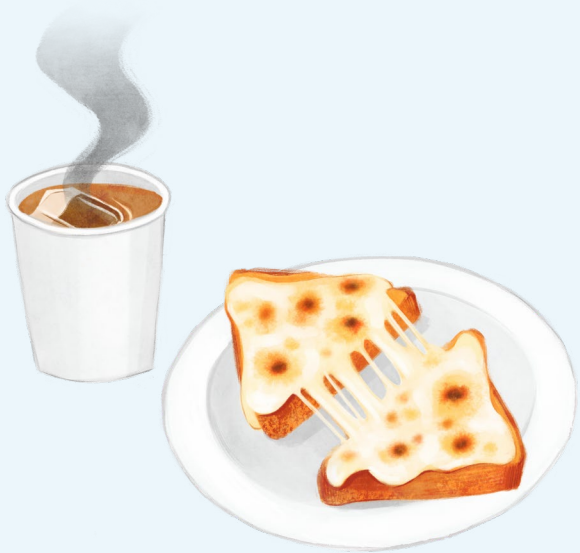
- 300ml milk
- 50g butter
- 50g plain flour
- 200g mature Cheddar cheese, grated
- 1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tsp English mustard
- ¼ tsp cayenne pepper
- salt and black pepper to taste
- 4 slices of thick bread (white, brown or granary)

Method

1. Make a white sauce using the quantities above, the sauce needs to be a thicker consistency than what you use for a lasagne. (Refer to the method on page 49.)
2. Remove the pan from the heat. Add the rest of the ingredients and stir to combine.
3. Toast the bread lightly under the grill on both sides. Evenly spread the cheese mixture onto one side of the toasted bread.
4. Pop it back under the grill for approx. 2 minutes until the cheese melts and has started to brown a little and bubble. Serve immediately.

Alternative method

1. Put the cheese, Worcestershire sauce and mustard into a bowl and gradually add some milk until the mixture has come together in a tight spreadable consistency.
2. Toast the bread on one side only and then on the uncooked side spread on the cheese mixture.
3. Pop it back under the grill again for approx. 2 minutes until the cheese melts and has started to brown a little and bubble, serve immediately.



TIPS

You can use a variety of cheese, such as mature Cheddar with some Gruyère, Edam or Emmental

A dash of brandy or ale can be added to the sauce for a more grown-up taste

Any leftover sauce can be used for other recipes, like Mac and Cheese (page 55) or Lasagne (page 51)

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Sandwich fillings

For the days when you didn't fancy anything from the hot section at the canteen or were having one of your parents' homemade sandwiches (including your dad's handprint or an extra treat from mum), there is a list of sandwich fillings across the next couple of pages that can be quickly rustled up using a range of everyday or leftover items from other recipes in **School Dinner Heaven.**

Makes enough for 1–2 sandwiches

Ingredients

- Bread, wrap or roll of your choice
- 2–3 tbsp of your chosen filling (below)

Method

BBQ Chicken – add a handful (about 100g) of cooked, shredded chicken, 1 tablespoon of sweetcorn and 2 tablespoons of your favourite shop-bought BBQ sauce to a bowl and mix well.

Coronation Chicken – add a handful (about 100g) of cooked, shredded chicken, 1 tablespoon of mayonnaise, 1 teaspoon of mango chutney, and 1 teaspoon of curry powder to a bowl and mix well. You can add a tablespoon of sultanas and ½ tablespoon of flaked almonds for extra texture and sweetness. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Chicken and Sweetcorn – add a handful (about 100g) of cooked, shredded chicken, 2 tablespoons of drained canned sweetcorn, and 1 tablespoon of mayonnaise to a bowl and mix well. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Tuna Mayonnaise – add 1 x 145g tin of tuna and between 1–1½ tablespoons of mayonnaise to a bowl with some seasoning and mix well for that classic, comforting filling. Jazz up your tuna mayo by adding ½ tablespoon of capers with some freshly cut chives and dill, sliced spring onion and black pepper.

Egg Mayonnaise – add 2–3 mashed hard-boiled eggs, 2 tablespoons of mayonnaise and 1 teaspoon of Dijon mustard to a bowl and mix well. Season with a pinch of paprika, salt and pepper to taste. (Freshly chopped chives and spring onions also work well with this and it's a great filling for the jacket potatoes on page 27.)

Ham Salad – spread a little butter (mayonnaise or Dijon mustard) on both slices of bread before layering up with 1–2 slices of lettuce, 1 tomato (sliced and lightly salted), ¼ cucumber (sliced) and ½ red onion (sliced) before topping with 1–2 slices of cooked ham.

Cheese and Tomato – add a handful (about 50g) of grated cheese, 1–2 diced tomatoes, and 1 tablespoon of mayonnaise to a bowl and mix well. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

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Two Toasties

Classic munch for an extra boost of energy after playing hide-and-seek or kicking a ball around! Each recipe makes one toastie and they can be cooked in a toastie maker but as it's not 1974 anymore, I've included a super-easy way using a frying pan.

Each recipe makes enough for 1 toastie

Ham and Cheese

Ingredients

- 2 slices of bread (your choice)
- 2 slices of ham
- 25g Cheddar cheese, grated or sliced
- 1–2 tsp butter

Cheese and Mushroom Toastie

Ingredients (as above, plus)

- 125g mushrooms, sliced and cooked in ½ tbsp olive oil
- salt and pepper

Method

1. Butter one side of each slice of bread.
2. Place one slice of bread, buttered side down, into a frying pan on a medium heat before adding half the cheese, followed by the ham or cooked mushrooms, then the remaining cheese, before topping with the other piece of bread, buttered side up.
3. Cook for 3–4 minutes on each side until golden brown and crispy. Remove from the pan, cut in half and enjoy hot.

Hedgehog Rolls

An old-school dish from your food tech lessons that makes soft, scrumptious breads that are perfect for dipping into soup or devouring while they're still warm. Careful of the spikes!

Makes 8 rolls

Preheat oven to 220°C/200°C fan/425°F/gas mark 6

Ingredients

- 450g strong white bread flour
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp caster sugar
- 7g fast-action dried yeast
- 50g butter
- 250ml milk
- 1 egg
- sultanas, raisins or pumpkin seeds

Method

1. Add the dry ingredients to one bowl, ensuring that the sugar, salt and yeast are on different sides of the bowl.
2. In a separate microwave-safe bowl, add the milk and butter before placing in the microwave and heating for 1–2 minutes. The butter should be almost melted and the milk should be warm, not hot.
3. Pour the butter and milk mixture into the bowl with the dry ingredients and combine until you form a dough. Once you have a rough ball of dough, add the egg and beat this together.
4. After you have formed the dough, remove it from the bowl and knead it for 5–10 minutes until you have smooth and elastic dough. Place the dough into a lightly oiled bowl and cover with cling film,

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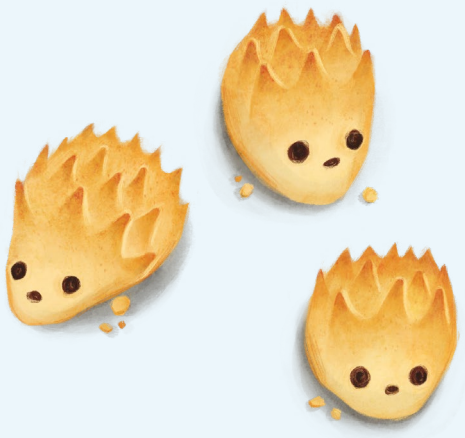
leaving it for an hour or until it has doubled in size.

5. When the dough has doubled in size, tip this out onto a lightly floured work surface and gently knock out the air. Divide the dough into 8 pieces and roll each piece of dough into a ball, tucking the sides underneath so that you have a smooth top.

6. After you've made balls, you will need to shape them into hedgehogs, which can be achieved by gently pulling one side of the ball so that it is in the shape of a snout. Take each hedgehog in your hands and use scissors to snip the tops to give the effect of spines. Beginning with a row just behind the 'head' of each hedgehog, work your way backwards to create hedgehog spikes. (Ensure that your snips are large and deep enough so that don't fall back into the dough when baking.)

7. Just before you place the rolls onto the prepared baking tray, add two sultanas or raisins for eyes. Repeat this step with all the rolls, making sure that you leave enough room between each roll to accommodate their second prove. Cover the rolls with cling film and leave them to rise again for around 30 minutes.

8. After the rolls have proved again, place them into the oven and bake for 10-15 minutes or until golden brown. You will know that they're ready when you hear a hollow sound after tapping each roll underneath.



Tomato Soup

An easy-to-make, comforting soup that is reminiscent of your favourite fluorescent-coloured soup from your youth – this is great for a midweek lunch and perfect for dipping into with a hedgehog roll (page 18) or a piece of cheese on toast (page 11).

Serves 2

Preheat oven to 200°C/180°C fan/400°F/gas mark 6

Ingredients

- 6 large tomatoes, cut into eighths
- 1 x 330g pack of cherry tomatoes, cut into halves
- 2 springs onion, cut into quarters
- 4–5 garlic cloves
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 1 tbsp tomato purée

Method

1. Add the tomatoes, spring onions and garlic along with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and the balsamic vinegar to a baking tray. Bake in the oven for 30–35 minutes or until the tomatoes juices have started to release.

2. Remove the garlic cloves and pour the cooking juices into a jug, reserving for later.

3. Drizzle the remaining olive oil over the tomatoes and add the tomato purée to the tray, mix well and bake for an additional 15 minutes.

4. Remove the tray from the oven. The tomatoes should be sticky

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and jammy now. Pour the gooey contents of the tray into a bowl or blender large enough to accommodate the cooked tomatoes and onions (careful, the juices will be hot), and add the reserved cooking juices and sweet garlic (skins removed).

5. Cover the mixture with boiling water so that it just covers the vegetables and blend until smooth.

6. Serve hot with bread and try not to eat it too quickly!

Instead of boiling water, use chicken or vegetable stock to top up the liquid. Alternatively, if you've any leftover chopped/plum tinned tomatoes, add these to the mixture before blending to your desired consistency

Adjust the amount of garlic to suit your taste. (No one pays attention anyway!)

Add a red chilli for the same amount of time as the garlic to add a bit more heat. If you'd like less, remove the seeds before adding this to the tray

Leek and Potato Soup

A classic, creamy soup that is both comforting and easy to prepare.

Serves 2

Ingredients

- 25g butter
- 1 medium leek, sliced
- 1 medium potato, peeled and diced
- 500ml vegetable stock
- 100ml milk
- salt and pepper

Method

1. Melt the butter in a large saucepan over medium heat.
2. Add the sliced leek and cook for about 5 minutes, until softened.
3. Add the diced potato and cook for another 2 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Pour in the vegetable stock and bring to a boil.
5. Reduce the heat and simmer for 15–20 minutes, until the potatoes are tender.
6. Blend the soup until smooth, stir in the milk and season with salt and pepper to taste.
7. Heat gently until the soup is hot, then serve.

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Carrot and Coriander Soup

A vibrant and fragrant soup that combines the sweetness of carrots with the freshness of coriander.

Serves 2

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 3 medium carrots, peeled and sliced
- 500ml vegetable stock
- small bunch of fresh coriander, chopped
- salt and pepper

Method

1. Heat the vegetable oil in a large saucepan over medium heat.
2. Add the chopped onion and cook for about 5 minutes, until softened.
3. Add the sliced carrots and cook for another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Pour in the vegetable stock and bring to a boil.
5. Reduce the heat and simmer for 15-20 minutes, until the carrots are tender.
6. Use a stick blender to blend the soup until smooth.
7. Stir in the chopped coriander and season with salt and pepper to taste.
8. Heat gently until the soup is hot, then serve.

Vegetable Soup

A hearty and wholesome soup packed with a variety of vegetables.

Serves 2

Ingredients

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 carrot, peeled and diced
- 1 potato, peeled and diced
- 1 courgette, diced
- 500ml vegetable stock
- 200g tinned chopped tomatoes
- 1 tsp dried mixed herbs
- salt and pepper to taste

Method

1. Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium heat.
2. Add the chopped onion and crushed garlic and cook for about 5 minutes, until softened.
3. Add the diced carrot, potato, and courgette, and cook for another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Pour in the vegetable stock and add the chopped tomatoes.
5. Stir in the dried mixed herbs and bring to a boil.
6. Reduce the heat and simmer for 20–25 minutes, until all the vegetables are tender.
7. Season with salt and pepper to taste.
8. Heat gently until the soup is hot, then serve.

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Jacket Potatoes

A regular in the school canteen, the humble jacket potato can be transformed into a delicious midweek lunch or dinner, whether they're loaded with tasty fillings or served with a slab of butter as a side dish, they're quick, easy and incredibly tasty with lots of butter!

Serves 4

Preheat oven to 200°C/180°C fan/400°F/gas mark 6

Ingredients

- 4 medium to large potatoes (good potatoes to use are Maris Piper)
- ½–1 tbsp olive oil
- table salt

Method

1. Wash your potatoes and pat with a piece of paper towel to make sure they are completely dry. Use a fork to gently prick the skin of each potato all over.
2. Rub the skin with the olive oil, you don't need too much, then sprinkle liberally with salt.
3. Place the potatoes on a suitable baking tray and bake for approx. 1–1½ hours, check them after about an hour, the skin should be crispy and the insides pillowy and soft.

Alternatively, you can cook your potatoes by using the below methods:

- If time is short, use your microwave to cook the potatoes. For this quantity and wattage of 900, the potatoes will need to be cooked for approx. 20 minutes turning after 10 minutes.

(You won't get crispy skins with this method but it's a good workaround if you are looking for a quick, comforting meal with lots of butter.)

- Part-cook the potatoes in the microwave for 15 minutes before transferring to the oven and cooking for 40-45 minutes.
- Prepare in the microwave and then transfer to an air fryer and cook for 10 minutes.

Stuffed Jackets

This takes a little bit longer but is well worth the extra time! Once the potatoes are out of the oven, let them cool enough so that you can handle them. Cut the potatoes in half lengthways and carefully scoop out the potato into a bowl, reserve the skins! Mash the potatoes with a little butter and milk, and some grated cheese before refilling the skins with the mashed potato mixture. Sprinkle some more cheese on top and place under a medium–high grill until the cheese has melted and is golden brown on top. You can bulk out these potatoes by adding cooked bacon, peas or any leftover cooked vegetables to the potato mix.

Fillings

Beans and Cheese – gently heat 1 x 415g tin of baked beans with a tablespoon of butter and a few dashes of Worcestershire sauce on a low–medium heat until steaming but not bubbling. Once cooked, slit your potatoes open, add a small handful of grated Cheddar cheese to each potato and divide the beans equally between them. Top with more Cheddar cheese for extra deliciousness.

Soured Cream and Chives – combine 1 x 150ml tub of soured cream with 2–3 tablespoons of freshly chopped chives, a tablespoon of mayonnaise and ½ clove of finely diced garlic before piling on top of your potato.

Coronation Chicken – see page 15 for recipe.
Tuna Mayonnaise – see page 16 for recipe.
Chilli Con Carne – see page 75 for recipe.
Bolognese – see page 47 for recipe.