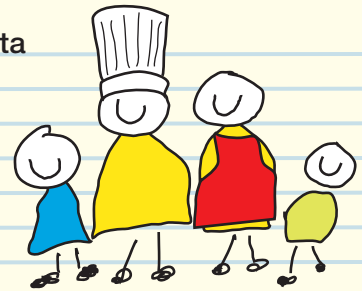




Wes Martin's Cheesy Pasta Bites (Makes 24)

1 cup dried riso (small orzo), alphabet, pastina or other small pasta
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus more for pan
1/4 cup dried fine bread crumbs
2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 cup lowfat milk
2 cups grated cheddar cheese
1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more as needed



Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Grease 2 twelve-portion mini-muffin tins (preferably non-stick) and coat the tins with bread crumbs, knocking out excess and reserving. Set pan aside.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Stir in the riso and boil until al dente, about 8 minutes. Drain and toss gently to prevent sticking and transfer to a medium bowl.

Meanwhile, melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Sprinkle the flour over it and cook, stirring, until the mixture is bubbling and smells nutty. Slowly whisk in the milk and continue whisking until the mixture comes to a simmer. Cook about 1 minute to thicken and whisk in the cheese and 1 teaspoon salt until cheese is melted and sauce is smooth. Remove from heat and pour over drained pasta. Stir well to combine. Fill the mini muffin tins with heaping tablespoons of the mixture. (There will be a little leftover- consider it a snack!) Sprinkle the reserved bread crumbs over the top.

Bake the pasta until bubbling and browning around the edges, about 20 minutes. Allow to cool at least 15 minutes before popping the bites out of the tin and serving.