

Gluten-free arepas offer rich corn flavor as counterpoint to gooey mozzarella filling



Arepas with Mozzarella Filling

Photos Susie Iventosch

By Susie Iventosch

When I saw these enticing corn-based snacks at a street fair in New York City last fall, I just couldn't pass them up! Anything made with corn has my number, but these also had a delicious, gooey mozzarella filling and the combination was delicious. They were like two thick corn pancakes with mozzarella cheese in the middle, grilled to perfection. I make mine with only corn flour, so this version is gluten-free too, and great for anyone with wheat allergies.

Arepas date back to pre-Colombian times, but are still a very popular staple in Colombia, Argentina, Panama and now, New York City! They can be served plain or with any

number of fillings from meats, to veggies and cheese, or even eggs. Or, you can top them with chopped tomatoes and cilantro. Sometimes they look more like an English muffin, with the filling in the middle, and sometimes they more resemble pancakes, a bit thinner. When I decided to make them myself, I tried several different recipes before settling on my own. I thinned out my batter and made them more like stacked thin pancakes, layered with the cheese. I think what makes them so tasty is that the batter is made with puréed frozen corn, so they have a really rich corn flavor.

We normally make the arepas about four inches in diameter, but on several occasions, we've made them smaller, about two-inches in

diameter, to serve as appetizers. Whichever way you decide to make these, they will probably become a staple in your diet, too. This recipe makes about 12 four-inch single pancakes, or 6 double stacked.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup frozen corn kernels
1 1/4 cup corn flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
3/4 cup milk
2 tablespoons melted butter
3 tablespoons canola oil or olive oil (for frying the corn cakes)
8 ounces fresh mozzarella, thinly sliced

DIRECTIONS

Place corn in the bowl of your food processor and puree until almost smooth. There will still be some lumps and that is okay.

Turn the corn out into a mixing bowl. Add all remaining ingredients except the mozzarella. Stir well. If the mixture is too thick, add a little extra milk.

Preheat the griddle over medium-high heat. Spoon the corn batter onto the griddle in whatever size pancakes you would like. We make a 4-inch pancake for a side dish, and we make a 2-inch pancake for an appetizer size.

Allow the pancakes to turn golden-brown on the bottom and then flip to cook the other side.

Once the second side is cooked, cover the tops of half the pancakes with a slice or two of the mozzarella. Then leaving the prettiest side up, place the remaining pancakes on top of the mozzarella. Cook just until cheese is melted and gooey.

If you want tall arepas, just double up the pancake sandwiches with a layer of mozzarella in between for a double arepa pancake sandwich.

Serve hot with your favorite hot sauce, salsa, or dipping sauce.

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Managing student stress in the pandemic and beyond

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.

Academics, entrepreneurs, innovators, and activists have long flocked to Northern California, creating a breeding ground for some of the best academic institutions and companies the world has to offer. Bay Area schools dominate lists of best high schools in California, according to SF-Gate (September 2021). For example last year Oakland's College Preparatory School and Hillsborough's Nueva School were identified by online platform Niche <https://www.niche.com/k12/rankings/> as the fourth and fifth best private high schools in the country last year. Meanwhile, Palo Alto's Henry M. Gunn High School was deemed the best public high school in California.

Attending a high-ranking high school often takes a toll on students' mental health. Many California students grow up in communities that expect extraordinary achievement both in and out of the classroom. Over the past two years a global pandemic halted student participation in extracurricular activities, delayed standardized testing, and caused school closures. While some students, at least initially, thrived with Zoom school, setting their own pace, and getting relief from extracurricular pressures, many

others suffered anxiety and depression.

Adolescence already demands a stockpile of coping skills to successfully make the transition to young adulthood; unfortunately, actions to control the pandemic stripped away many of the coping mechanisms that make the stresses of adolescence and its accompanying social and academic pressures more manageable. Canceled sports practices and social distancing measures make fun forms of exercise and important interpersonal connections less accessible. Teens with various mental health challenges were often left without the tools they relied on to manage them.

While the pandemic has caused tangible shifts in everyday life for all of us, these changes magnified problems for many of our most vulnerable adolescents. The pandemic also altered many academic requirements for students; for example, test-optional college admissions is becoming increasingly more popular. While these changes have reduced stress for some students, for others the uncertainty surrounding the value of requirements they once believed were essential has increased academic pressure as grades and rigor or coursework take on increasing importance. Thus, for two cycles of high school seniors,

navigating the pressure of schoolwork and college applications in an unconventional learning environment has not made academic life easier. These issues make it ever more vital to understand how to recognize signs that students may be struggling with their mental health and respond accordingly.

What are the signs that students are under too much stress? Alterations in sleeping, eating, and exercising schedules, engaging in more negative self-talk, and expressing less optimism about the future are some of the sure signs a student is suffering. Certainly engaging in "high risk" behavior like self-isolation, substance abuse, or verbal and physical aggression is a clear sign of trouble. While some stress may help highly motivated students spend more time studying, too much negatively affects all aspects of healthy living including their academic performance – in particular, high levels of anxiety can prevent students from engaging in the critical thinking needed to perform well on exams.

What can we do to help? Students' mental health can be improved by surrounding them with a compassionate support system that recognizes the pressures of adolescence. Fostering open and thoughtful conversations about the stresses of school

can ensure that teens feel comfortable talking about their mental health. Many students may feel uncomfortable discussing their mental health challenges; sparking compassionate conversations may help them express their emotions and seek out support. For example, if you notice your student sleeping less or self-isolating, let them know what you are observing and ask how you can best support them. Be sure to emphasize that their negative feelings are not permanent, and assure them that they have the ability to improve their mental health with the help of supportive family and friends. For teens with test anxiety, helping them identify a clear-cut system for test preparation that reflects their learning style can help develop study habits that will set them up for success in college.

More generally, practices like journaling, mindfulness, meditation, and deep breathing can be employed to help improve mental health. Many high schools now offer yoga to fill a PE requirement, and I often hear students tell me how much they enjoy this class. Therapy or other treatment may also be helpful, especially as dedicated care providers can guide teens through specialized programs taking emotional, familial, and cultural factors into account.

In high achieving pressured environments, like we often find in our affluent California communities, it is especially important to create space for supportive conversations and as necessary take action to support adolescent mental health.



Elizabeth LaScala, PhD personally guides each student through each step of selecting and applying to well-matched schools for undergraduate and graduate school study. Over the past two decades, Elizabeth has placed hundreds of students in some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the U.S. The number of clients taken is limited to ensure each applicant has personalized attention. Contact Elizabeth early in the process to make a difference in your outcomes. Write elizabeth@doingcollege.com; Visit www.doingcollege.com; or Call: 925.385.0562.

GCCP presents 'Culture, Crisis, and Creativity' with the Horszowski Piano Trio



The Horszowski Piano Trio

Photo provided

Submitted by Pamela Freund-Striplen

The Gold Coast Chamber Players are delighted to bring back live music to

the Lamorinda community at 7:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 25 at the Don Tatzin Community Hall at the Lafayette Library. The live concert will be recorded and all ticket holders will have the option to watch the concert

virtually from March 3 to July 1. Proof of vaccination is required and N95 masks will be provided.

"Culture, Crisis, and Creativity" features the esteemed Horszowski Piano Trio based in New York City. Giving performances that are "lithe, persuasive" (The New York Times), "eloquent and enthralling" (The Boston Globe), and described as "the most compelling American group to come on the scene" (The New Yorker), the Horszowski Trio has quickly become a vital force in the international chamber music world.

This colorful program features piano trios by Bedřich Smetana, Rebecca Clarke, and Arno Babadjanian, which grapple with political struggles and personal challenges. As the most distinguished British female composer of the inter-war generation, Rebecca Clarke composed her trio on the heels of the 1918 influenza pandemic while battling prevailing sexist attitudes and personal depression. Clarke's Piano

Trio (1921) is an extraordinary work of striking originality and craft reflecting some of the most modern influences of the time including Ravel, Bloch and Debussy with its impressionist atmosphere. Bedřich Smetana, whose work is imbued with inflections of Czech folk music, wrote his emotional op.15 trio as a response to the death of his daughter. Smetana's lone piano trio is a milestone of romanticism. Much of Arno Babadjanian's music is rooted in Armenian folk music and folklore. Passionate and full of memorable melodies, Babadjanian's Piano Trio in F-sharp minor is considered one of his most important works.

Tickets: \$15-45 online (<https://app.artspeople.com/index.php?show=123572>) or by phone at (925) 283-3728. For more information, visit <https://www.gccpmusic.com/>