The swap: Heavy cream → Fat-free half-and-half

Marry Me Chicken Gnocchi Soup

By Angie Hayman · Recipe CH-001

Creamy Marry Me Chicken Gnocchi Soup made lighter with fat-free half-and-half, tender chicken, spinach, mushrooms, and Parmesan. Big flavor, smarter calories!



PREP	COOK	TOTAL	SERVINGS	DIFFICULTY	CALORIES
20 min	35–40 min	~1 hr	10–12	Easy–Moderate	~325 est. per serving

Soup · Italian-inspired American · High-protein · Calorie-conscious

Approximate Nutrition

Estimated

Per serving (About 1½ cups)

~325	~22g	~35g	~9g	~3g
CALORIES	PROTEIN	CARBS	FAT	FIBER

Nutrition information is an approximation and may vary depending on the brands and products used, exact ingredient quantities, and portion sizes.

Ingredients

Makes 10–12 · About 1½ cups

CHICKEN

- [ ] **2 lbs** Boneless skinless chicken breast
- [ ] **1 tbsp** Olive oil
- [ ] **1 tbsp** Lightly dried Italian herbs
- [ ] Paprika, To taste
- [ ] Black pepper, To taste

SOUP BASE

- [ ] **1 tbsp** Unsalted butter
- [ ] **8–12 oz** Mushrooms, sliced
- [ ] **1** Medium onion, diced
- [ ] **5–6** Garlic cloves, minced
- [ ] **½ cup** Sun-dried tomatoes, chopped
- [ ] **1 tbsp** Tomato paste
- [ ] **½ tbsp** Lightly dried Italian herbs
- [ ] **½ tsp** Dried thyme
- [ ] **½ tsp** Paprika
- [ ] **¼–½ tsp** Crushed red pepper flakes
- [ ] Black pepper, To taste

BROTH & FINISHING INGREDIENTS

- [ ] **10 cups total** Water
- [ ] Knorr chicken bouillon, To taste, slightly lighter than package directions
- [ ] **2 packages (17.6 oz each)** Priano potato gnocchi
- [ ] **1¼ cups** Fat-free half-and-half
- [ ] **½ cup** Parmesan cheese, shredded
- [ ] **3 cups** Fresh baby spinach
- [ ] **1 tbsp** Lemon juice

Ingredient note: We used Priano potato gnocchi from Aldi and Gourmet Garden lightly dried Italian herbs. Other brands work just as well, but nutritional values may differ.

Instructions

1 Prepare the chicken

Cut the chicken breast into bite-sized pieces.

Season with Italian herbs, paprika, and black pepper.

Heat olive oil in a large stockpot over medium-high heat.

Brown chicken in batches for approximately 3–4 minutes per batch.

The chicken does not need to be fully cooked at this stage.

Remove from the pot and set aside.

2 Build the flavor base

Reduce heat to medium.

Add butter and sliced mushrooms to the same pot.

Cook until the mushrooms release their moisture and begin to brown.

Add diced onion and sauté until softened.

Stir in minced garlic and cook approximately 30 seconds.

3 Add the flavor boosters

Add:

- Sun-dried tomatoes
- Tomato paste
- Italian herbs
- Thyme

- Paprika
- Crushed red pepper flakes
- Black pepper

Stir and cook for approximately 1–2 minutes.

Scrape the browned bits from the bottom of the pot as you stir.

> **Calorie Hacker Tip:** Those browned bits add incredible flavor without requiring additional butter or cream.

4 Create the broth

Pour in 8 cups of water.

Add Knorr chicken bouillon, using slightly less than the package recommends.

Return the chicken to the pot.

Bring to a gentle simmer.

Cook until the chicken reaches an internal temperature of 165°F.

5 Add the gnocchi

Add both packages of potato gnocchi.

Simmer according to package instructions, approximately 2–3 minutes, or until tender.

Add the remaining 2 cups of water and approximately 2 teaspoons of Knorr bouillon.

This creates a more generous, brothy soup rather than an overly thick sauce.

6 Make it creamy

Reduce heat to low.

Stir in the fat-free half-and-half.

Add Parmesan cheese and stir until incorporated.

Avoid boiling vigorously after adding the dairy.

7 Finish with spinach

Add fresh spinach.

Stir until wilted.

Finish with 1 tablespoon lemon juice.

Taste and adjust seasoning as needed.

8 Serve

Ladle approximately 1½ cups into bowls.

Garnish with a small sprinkle of Parmesan cheese if desired.

Optional: Add hot sauce or extra crushed red pepper flakes for additional heat.

Big Flavor. Smarter Ingredients.

The Calorie Hack

Traditional creamy chicken gnocchi soups often rely on heavy cream, additional butter, and large amounts of cheese. We made a few strategic changes.

Traditional approach	Our Calorie Hack
~~Heavy cream~~	✓ **Fat-free half-and-half**
~~Large quantities of butter~~	✓ **Just 1 tablespoon in the soup base**
~~Heavy cream-based sauce~~	✓ **Flavorful chicken broth with a creamy finish**
~~Extra cheese for richness~~	✓ **A measured ½ cup Parmesan**
~~Mostly chicken and gnocchi~~	✓ **Added mushrooms and fresh spinach**

Why it works

- **Fat-free half-and-half:** Adds creaminess without the fat content of heavy cream.
- **Mushrooms:** Add savory, umami flavor and bulk without significantly increasing calories.
- **Sun-dried tomatoes:** Deliver concentrated flavor, making the soup taste richer without requiring additional cream.
- **Chicken breast:** Provides lean protein that helps make the soup satisfying.
- **Broth:** Creates generous portions while keeping the soup lighter than a cream-heavy version.

Make It a Meal

One serving: ~325 cal

This soup is satisfying on its own, but if you're looking for a heartier meal, try pairing it with crusty bread, a side salad, or an extra half serving

- **Side salad +~80 cal**
  Add greens, vegetables, and a light dressing.
- **Crusty bread +~150 cal**
  Perfect for dipping into that creamy broth.

Illustrative estimates. Actual calories depend on portions, ingredients, and dressing.

Angie's Kitchen Notes

What we learned making it

1. **Don't rush the mushrooms.**
   Allowing the mushrooms to brown adds depth to the soup.
2. **Use the entire two packages of gnocchi.**
   This is a large family-sized recipe, and the extra gnocchi makes it hearty enough for dinner.

3. **Adjust the broth as needed.**
   We originally started with 8 cups of water but added another 2 cups once the gnocchi went in.
4. **Don't skip the lemon.**
   That tablespoon of lemon juice brightens the finished soup and balances the creamy broth.
5. **Adjust the heat to your preference.**
   Crushed red pepper adds a little warmth without overwhelming the other flavors.

Storage & Reheating

- **Refrigerator:** Store in an airtight container for 3–4 days.
- **Freezer:** Freezing is possible, but the gnocchi may become soft and the dairy-based broth may separate when reheated.
- **Reheating:** Warm gently over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally. Add a splash of water or broth if the soup has thickened.
- **Food safety:** Refrigerate promptly, within two hours of cooking. Reheat leftovers to 165°F.

Leftover safety, the USDA way: Refrigerate within 2 hours · Enjoy within 3–4 days · Freeze for up to 3–4 months · Reheat to 165°F. USDA: Leftovers and Food Safety: fsis.usda.gov

Hack It Again

Cook once, eat twice

Turn the leftovers into tomorrow's lunch. Less waste, less money, less thinking.

- **Lunch tomorrow ~220 cal**
  Half a serving in a tortilla or over greens

Real Food. Simple Swaps. Healthier Plates.

Rate this recipe and find more simple swaps at thecaloriehacker.com