

Hooked on Halloumi

If you're not hooked on halloumi, you soon will be! Sliced thinly and pan fried until it develops a golden crusty skin and soft chewy centre, halloumi lends itself to being served in so many ways! You'll have to read on to find out...



Whenever I want to get the low down on a particular cheese, all I've got to do is call my brother.

He's been in the food industry all his working life and has, in more recent years, developed a business which imports cheese from all over the world.

Hence, the rapid weight gain (only joking).

Anyway, he was more than happy to share his knowledge or risk being badgered by me until he did!

Here goes ...

Me: If I wanted to describe halloumi to someone who's never tried it before, what would I say?

Brother: Halloumi to me is a gift from the Gods...it must be my family's Cypriot roots, so I am a little biased, but there is no denying how delicious and unique halloumi is. Its sweet flavour supplied by the sheep and goat's milk is balanced by the salt that's added before it cures. Some halloumi brands are a little more salty than others but time on the grill does tend to tone it down. Cyprus no doubt owns the title, '*King of Halloumi*', but many countries, including Australia produce halloumi that's generally a little less salty.



Me: What do I look for if I want a traditional halloumi?

Brother: Authentic halloumi is made of ewe's and goat's milk only. This dates back thousands of years when it was made by Cypriot shepherds. Back then, halloumi was a seasonal cheese, made only during springtime. Mint leaves were added when the

folding occurred; not something you see much of these days. My business partner's mother who made halloumi regularly when living in Cyprus, did exactly that, mint in every fold. She said it was to help preserve and add some flavour. She should know; she made it for decades. These days halloumi is made from 3 types of milk, adding cow's milk to the mix. The main reason being the shortage of ewe's and sheep's milk in Cyprus.



Me: Why is halloumi shaped that way?

Brother: Genuine halloumi gets its shape (a rounded rectangle), from the way it's made and the way it's roughly folded in half; sometimes with mint leaves tucked in the centre. Industrial halloumi is sold in uniform blocks.

Me: Why do my halloumi slices separate?

Brother: Some blocks have a seam running through the middle. It's the way they're folded when they're at the pliable stage. When slicing halloumi at right angles to the seam, you get what looks like a pair of legs. To help stop the slices from separating, slice lengthways. Don't slice too thinly; about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cm / $\frac{1}{2}$ inch is good. This isn't a guarantee, but it helps.



Me: Where does that 'squeaky' sound come from when I bite into halloumi?

Brother: There's a few theories about the texture and that "squeak" that happens when biting into it. For me, it comes down to the process of how halloumi is made and less about the type of milk used or the proteins in the milk. Back to my partner's mum. She made halloumi from all 3 types of milk;

using either sheep's milk, goat's milk, cow's milk and sometimes using a combination. No matter which milk she used, they all had the same texture and the halloumi 'squeak'.

Me: What's the best way to cook halloumi?

Brother: The trick with halloumi is to cook it slowly. Have the heat too high and you will burn it. It's better to use medium heat and get both sides of the halloumi golden brown.



Thank you brother for all that info. Anytime you need an assistant on those overseas trade conferences you attend, I'm your girl!

Danielle

Cooking Time: 3 – 4 minutes (halloumi slices only)



Ingredients

- 1 x 250 g/ 9 oz packet of halloumi (note 1)
 - 1 lemon cut into wedges
 - optional: finely chopped fresh mint or dried oregano
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Instructions

1. Heat a non stick frypan over medium heat. You don't need to add any oil.
 2. Remove halloumi from it's package.
 3. Hold firmly and cut 1 cm/ 1/2" slices, lengthways.
 4. Lay the halloumi slices in the pan. Cook for about 1 1/2 – 2 minutes each side. The halloumi needs to form a nice golden brown crust. You may notice that it releases moisture (brine) while cooking. That's ok.
 5. See note 2 for serving suggestions.
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Notes

1. For this post, I used a brand called Emporium which is made in the traditional shape of halloumi (as opposed to uniform square blocks) and is packaged in it's own brine with finely chopped mint. Emporium halloumi is made with

sheep, goat and cow's milk. This is just one brand, there are many others. BTW this brand isn't imported by my brother; still waiting on the free samples. ☐

2. **Serving Suggestions:**

Veggie Stack: Creating a veggie stack is about using whatever ingredients you like. This is how I made my stack. Slice half of 1 small eggplant into 1 cm/1/2 " rounds. Lightly salt both sides and set aside; the time it's takes to prepare the other veggies will give the eggplant enough time to release any excess liquid. Pat down the excess moisture from the eggplant just before frying. Thinly slice 1 small zucchini into 1 cm/1/2 " rounds. Cut a small cauliflower in half, then slice one or two 2 cm / 3/4" thick rounds. Cut about 5 cherry tomatoes in half. I also used store bought roasted capsicum/red bell peppers. Heat 1-2 tbsps of olive oil in a medium frypan over moderate high heat. Lightly fry the veggies. Transfer to a plate. Add white pepper and salt to taste, and drizzle with a little white wine vinegar. **Poached Egg:** Crack one egg and set aside in a small bowl. Fill a medium saucepan with water and bring to the boil. Add 2 tbsp white vinegar. Stir the water until you create a whirlpool. Carefully lower the egg into the saucepan. Do not stir. Remove with slotted spoon after 3 – 4 minutes. Set aside. To assemble the stack: Place the cauliflower on a plate, add the zucchini on top followed by eggplant, roasted capsicum and tomatoes. Add the pan fried or grilled halloumi and squeeze lemon juice over it. Place the poached egg on top. Add salt, pepper and finely chopped parsley.

Anitpasto Plate: For my antipasto plate I doubled the same ingredients I used in my veggie stack and added olives (no poached egg). Of course, you can add whatever else you wish.

Grated: Halloumi can be grated over savoury dishes such as pasta or even pizza, although it doesn't melt in the same way as mozzarella does.

Halloumi Kebabs:
Thread vegetables of your choice and halloumi cut into cubes onto skewers. Cook under a grill or bbq until the halloumi is golden and the veggies have softened.