

# How to get the crispiest topping on classic Midwest tater tot hotdish?

[Midwest Foodie \(www.vchale.com\)](http://www.vchale.com)

## The Quest for the Perfect Crispy Tater Tot Topping

Tater Tot Hotdish is a beloved staple across the Midwest, a comforting casserole that brings together ground meat, creamy soup, vegetables, and, of course, a crowning glory of tater tots. While the filling is undoubtedly delicious, the true mark of a masterfully made hotdish often lies in the irresistible crispiness of those golden potato nuggets on top. Too often, however, they emerge from the oven soggy and sad. Fear not, fellow hotdish enthusiasts! Achieving that coveted crunch is entirely within reach with a few simple, yet crucial, techniques.



## **Start Smart: Frozen Tots and Preheated Perfection**

The foundation of a crispy topping begins before the tots even hit the pan. Always start with frozen tater tots; thawing them can introduce excess moisture, which is the enemy of crispiness. Furthermore, don't just dump them onto a cold hotdish. For best results, consider preheating your oven to a higher temperature (like 400°F or 200°C) initially. Some even advocate for par-baking the tots separately on a baking sheet for 10-15 minutes until lightly golden before adding them to the hotdish.

## **The Golden Rule: Embrace the Fat**

Fat is flavor, and in this case, it's also essential for crispiness. A light, even coating of oil or melted butter on your tater tots can make all the difference. You can toss the frozen tots with a tablespoon or two of vegetable oil, canola oil, or even melted butter in a bowl before arranging them on top of your hotdish. This thin layer helps conduct heat, promoting a beautifully golden-brown and crunchy exterior. Avoid over-oiling, as this can make them greasy rather than crisp.



## **Single Layer, Ample Space, and High Heat**

One of the most common mistakes is overcrowding the tots. For maximum crispiness, aim for a single layer across the top of your hotdish, ensuring each tot has direct exposure to the oven's heat. If tots are piled high, they'll steam rather than crisp. Maintain a consistent oven temperature, typically around 375-

400°F (190-200°C), for the majority of the cooking time. This heat allows the moisture to escape and the potato to fry rather than steam.



## Unconventional Boosters for Next-Level Crunch

For an extra boost of crispiness, some chefs swear by a secret ingredient: a light dusting of cornstarch or baking powder. After tossing your tots with oil, sprinkle about half a teaspoon of cornstarch or baking powder over a pound of tots and toss again. Cornstarch absorbs surface moisture and creates a delicate, crispy shell, while baking powder reacts with heat to create tiny air bubbles, contributing to a lighter, crispier texture. Don't overdo it, or you might detect a starchy or metallic taste.



## The Broiler's Role: The Grand Finale

If your hotdish is cooked through but the tots still aren't reaching their peak crispiness, the broiler is your best friend. For the last 5-10 minutes of cooking, carefully place your hotdish under a preheated broiler. Keep a close eye on it, as tots can go from perfectly golden to burnt in a matter of seconds. Rotate the dish if necessary to ensure even browning. This high, direct heat will give them that final, irresistible crunch and a beautiful deep golden color.





## **Serve Immediately for Peak Performance**

Once your hotdish emerges from the oven, glistening with perfectly crispy tots, resist the urge to let it sit for too long. While a brief resting period for the filling is fine, the tots are at their crispiest immediately. The longer they sit, especially covered, the more they will absorb moisture from the steam and filling,

slowly losing their hard-earned crunch. Dish it up quickly and savor every bite of your perfectly executed, crispy-topped Midwest classic!