

# Perfect Pasta Every Time

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Hectic schedules or busy days often leave little to no time to prep meals in the kitchen. If you don't want to work overtime in the kitchen, pasta can be your go-to solution for a quick, tasty, and nutritious meal. Pasta is an inexpensive food option.

Pasta is a high carbohydrate food. Carbohydrates are the body's main source of energy. Most pasta has been enriched with added iron, thiamin, niacin, riboflavin, and folic acid. It is also a good source of protein and complex carbohydrates, which includes fiber. Pasta is low in fat, cholesterol, sodium, and calories. The calories come with the sauce!

## Popular Types of Pastas

**Spaghetti** is long, round, and thin strips. Spaghetti can be used to make the traditional spaghetti dishes but is also suited for meat or cream sauces.

**Farfalle** looks like small bow ties. Farfalle is suited for tomato-based sauces, cream sauces, and butter or olive oil. It's great when combined with sautéed vegetables.

**Fettuccine** is flat ribbons of pasta. Fettuccine can be used with thicker sauces and works well with thicker cuts of vegetables and meat. The classic dish with this pasta is fettuccine Alfredo.

**Linguine** is long, thin, and flat strips of pasta. Linguine is very versatile and is most commonly used in seafood dishes, such as linguine with clam sauce. Use linguine with a tomato or cream-based sauce.



**Penne** are medium-sized, ridged tubes of pasta. Penne can be used with many different sauces, including tomato, cream, and meat-based sauces. Try penne arrabbiata for a simple, traditional recipe.

**Rotini** are medium-sized spirals of pasta. Rotini works great with cream or tomato-based sauces. Try it in macaroni and cheese, or use it in baked dishes. It is also perfect for cold salads.

## Building Quick Pasta Dishes

Try a Pasta Night with your family by building your own dish! Follow these steps toward building your own pasta dish. Bulking up pasta with vegetables can keep your pasta portions in check while allowing you to feel full.

### 1. Choose Your Pasta

Spaghetti	Fettuccine
Farfalle	Rigatoni
Gemelli	Penne
Linguini	Fusilli
Rotini	Orzo

### 2. Choose Your Sauce

Marinara	Alfredo
Butter and/or Olive Oil	Meat Sauce
Pesto	

### 3. Customize

Vegetables:	Protein:
Peppers	Chicken
Asparagus	Sausage
Spinach	Meatball
Zucchini	Ham
Onions	Anchovies
Mushrooms	
Broccoli	

### Toppings

Capers	Mozzarella
Olives	Parmesan
Garlic	Feta
Fresh Basil	

## Wheat Pasta Alternatives

Pasta can be made from other ingredients besides wheat. Your grocery store has a variety of alternatives. Gluten-free options are also available. Here are few examples with protein and fiber comparisons.

### Whole-wheat Pasta

Whole-grain pastas are a great source of fiber, but it is important to read the label. Look for the word “whole” before the first ingredient in the

ingredient list. Whole wheat offers fewer calories per serving and almost three times the fiber than regular enriched pasta.

Calories (per 2 oz): 180 calories

Protein: 8 g

Carbohydrates: 39 g (7 g fiber)

Fat: 1.5 g fat

Sodium: 0 mg

### Chickpea Pasta

Chickpea pasta is a plant-based pasta with high amounts of protein and fiber.

Calories (per 2 oz): 190 calories

Protein: 14 g

Carbohydrates: 32 g (8 g fiber)

Fat: 3.5 g fat

Sodium: 60 mg

### Black Bean Pasta

Black bean pasta is an excellent source of protein at an affordable price.

Calories (per 2 oz): 215 calories

Protein: 25 g

Carbohydrates: 23 g (12 g fiber)

Fat: 2 g

Sodium: 4 mg

### Red Lentil Pasta

Red lentil pasta is made from legumes. This red colored pasta is a great way to spice up your traditional pasta dishes.

Calories (per 2 oz): 300 calories

Protein: 21 g

Carbohydrates: 53 g (11 g fiber)

Fat: 1 g

Sodium: 15 g

## Adding Pasta to Your Diet

1. Keep plenty of pasta on hand for guests.
2. If you're serving pasta for dinner, make a little extra for your lunch the next day. A cold pasta salad tossed with vegetables or fruit is delicious. In colder months, heat up leftover spaghetti or lasagna.

3. Try a cold pasta salad lunch.
4. If you're counting calories, satisfy your palate with a variety of pasta dishes tossed with a light sauce or dressing.
5. On a budget? Most pasta recipes can be served for just pennies per serving. You can stretch a meal by adding pasta to your recipe.
6. Use a minimum amount of pasta and more vegetables to keep your pasta serving size in check while still feeling full.

## Cooking Pasta

Pasta has a wide variety of shapes and sizes, but which one to use? As a guideline, consider that larger, bulkier sauces complement larger pastas. Delicate pastas are enhanced by elegant sauces or oils.

USDA MyPlate recommends a serving size of 1/2 cup of pasta and 1/2 cup of sauce. Keep in mind that very few recipes meet this recommendation. Measure your serving size at home on your plates to figure out what your true serving size is.

Allow two ounces of dry pasta for every serving. This yields about 1 cup of cooked pasta. The key to successfully cooking pasta is to use plenty of water and avoid overcooking. For perfect pasta every time, follow these instructions.

1. In a large pot, bring 4 to 6 quarts of water to a boil for every pound of dry pasta. Add 1 teaspoon of salt, if desired, per gallon of water.
2. When the water reaches a hard, rolling boil, add the pasta gradually, while stirring. The rapid boil helps circulate the pasta for uniform results. Allow the water to return to a boil and stir occasionally to prevent sticking.
3. Follow the package directions for cooking times. Each brand and shape have been tested by the manufacturer to determine the best cooking times. The pasta should be tender to fairly firm (al dente). If the pasta is used as part of a dish that requires further cooking, slightly undercook the pasta.
4. Drain pasta in a colander to stop the cooking process. Do not rinse unless the recipe



specifically says to do so. Many people rinse their pasta after cooking to remove excess starch. But the excess starch helps to absorb the sauce. If you are not going to immediately add the sauce to the pasta, add 1 to 2 tablespoons of olive oil to prevent the pasta from sticking together.

## Traditional Italian Pasta Recipes

While we might think pasta is an Italian food, it is believed to have been brought to Italy from China by Marco Polo during the 13th century. It is estimated that there are more than 350 different types of pasta, but this is because some types may have different names in different languages, or even in the same language. In Italy, names vary according to region.

Nonetheless, Italy has given us many delicious recipes that it would be worth mastering. Don't be afraid to expand your usual spaghetti with meatball or chicken alfredo recipes and explore traditional Italian recipes, such as, Pasta Bolognese, cacio e pepe, spaghetti carbonara, beef and pork ragu, and bucatini all'amatriciana.

## **Storing Pasta**

### **Uncooked (dry)**

Pasta will last almost indefinitely if stored in a cool, dry place in an airtight container.

### **Uncooked (fresh)**

Fresh pasta can be stored in the refrigerator for 2 to 3 days in an airtight container. Freeze the pasta if it will not be used within 2 to 3 days. Fresh pasta may be frozen for about 1 month.

### **Cooked (fresh and dry)**

Refrigerate cooked pasta in an airtight container for up to 5 days. Because pasta will continue to absorb flavors and oils from sauces, cooked pasta and sauce should be stored separately. Cooked pasta can also be frozen up to 2 months without loss of quality.

## **Freezing Pasta**

The best pasta shapes for freezing are those used in baked recipes, such as lasagna, jumbo shells, ziti, and manicotti. For best results in casseroles, prepare the recipe and freeze it before baking. To bake, thaw the dish in the refrigerator and then bake about 10 minutes longer than the recipe directs.

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