

Perfect Pasta

Children should have access to healthy food and be able to make healthy food choices wherever they are – at home, in school, and in the community. Improving the health of the nation’s children and reversing the childhood obesity epidemic is a shared responsibility and will take the commitment of parents, the foodservice industry, the media, and schools working together.

Healthful Pastabilities

Pasta is a low fat food and a good source of folic acid, iron, and numerous other nutrients, making it an ideal food as part of a healthy diet for children. Pasta is an excellent base for healthful vegetables.

Try these ideas for making your pasta dishes more healthful for your family.

- Use one of the many varieties of whole wheat pasta available. Start by combining whole wheat with regular pasta to help your children adjust to the new taste.
- Enhance the nutritional value and flavor of your favorite tomato sauce by adding chopped or shredded vegetables. Try mushrooms, spinach, carrots, zucchini, red peppers, or beets.
- Use including pasta in vegetable soups, side dishes, cold salads, and as the main dish.
- Use various pasta shapes to add a fun twist for children.
- Pair plenty of vegetables, such as carrots, zucchini, and fresh tomatoes, with pasta for a tasty cold salad.
- Use a small pasta shape, such as orzo, when adding it to vegetable soup. Pasta cooked in the soup broth is more flavorful than cooking in plain water.
- Experiment with other vegetable sauces as an alternative to the traditional tomato sauce. Sauté onions and garlic; add your favorite vegetable to water or stock. Puree the vegetables to a smooth consistency and serve with any pasta. Some suggested vegetables include broccoli, butternut squash, peas, cauliflower, or red peppers.
- Keep fresh herbs on hand as a quick and easy way to add a lot of flavor to pasta dishes. Fresh herbs are best added at the last minute for the best flavor. Fresh basil and parsley are often used in pasta dishes.
- Pair pasta with beans or lentils for a protein-rich, but inexpensive and delicious meatless meal.



Things to consider:

- Cook pasta in plenty of boiling water. Use at least one gallon of water for each pound of pasta.
- Season the water with salt prior to cooking. Use at least 1/2 tablespoon of salt per gallon of water.
- Serve modest sized portions. A healthy portion size is 1 to 2 ounces of dried pasta or 1/2 to 1 cup of cooked pasta.
- Cook according to time specified in directions. Pasta should be cooked al dente, meaning “to the tooth.”

Resources

National Pasta Association – www.ilovepasta.org
Whole Grains Council – www.wholegrainscouncil.org

For more information, visit us on the web at nfsmi.org

National Food Service Management Institute
The University of Mississippi
6 Jeanette Phillips Drive
Post Office Drawer 188
University, Mississippi 38677-0188
800-321-3054 · nfsmi@olemiss.edu



For more information, visit us on the Web at www.nfsmi.org

Powerful Pasta Sauce*

Yield: 2 quarts

2 tablespoons	Olive oil	1 tablespoon	Oregano, dried
1 medium	Onion, chopped	1 tablespoon	Basil, dried
3 cloves	Garlic, sliced	1 teaspoon	Chili flakes, crushed
1/2 cup	Carrots, shredded	1/2 teaspoon	Salt
1 cup	Zucchini, grated	1/2 teaspoon	Black pepper, fresh ground
8 ounces	Mushroom	Dash	Cayenne pepper
2 cans	Crushed tomatoes		

- Heat olive oil in a medium sauce pan. Sauté chopped onions until lightly caramelized.
- Add the chopped garlic, carrots, zucchini, and mushrooms. Sauté for approximately 5 minutes until the mushrooms have cooked down. Add the crushed tomatoes. Simmer 15 minutes. Add oregano, basil, chili flakes, salt, black pepper, and cayenne pepper.
- Serve with your favorite whole grain pasta.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 1/2 cup
Servings Per Container 16

Amount Per Serving		% Daily Value*	
Calories 60	Calories from Fat 20		
Total Fat 2g			3%
Saturated Fat 0g			0%
Trans Fat 0g			
Cholesterol 0mg			0%
Sodium 210mg			9%
Total Carbohydrate 10g			3%
Dietary Fiber 3g			12%
Sugars 1g			
Protein 2g			
Vitamin A 30%	Vitamin C 20%		
Calcium 6%	Iron 10%		

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Saturated Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

Ricotta Gnocchi with Broccoli Sauce*

Fresh Ricotta

Yield: 28 ounces

1 gallon	Whole milk
3/4 cup	White distilled vinegar
1 tablespoon	Kosher salt

- Combine milk, vinegar, and salt in a large saucepan and over low heat; bring to 140 °F while constantly stirring with a rubber spatula.
- Stop stirring when the mixture has reached 140 °F (about 10 to 12 minutes) and allow the mixture to reach 180 °F (another 8 to 10 minutes). Remove from heat and gently ladle separated curds out of pot into a cheesecloth lined strainer, leaving the (whey) liquid behind.
- Allow curds to drain for about 1 hour or until the correct consistency is obtained. Discard whey.

Broccoli Sauce

Yield: 6 servings: 1/2 cup

2 tablespoons	Extra virgin olive oil
1/2 each	White onion, sliced
1/2 teaspoon	Pepperoncini
8 ounces	Broccoli, chopped
	Salt and pepper
2 cups	Chicken stock
2 ounces	Parmesan cheese, grated
	Croutons for garnish, optional

- Heat 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil in a sauté pan. Add onion and cook for 5 minutes until softened and lightly golden. Add chicken stock and broccoli and cook for 8 to 10 minutes until broccoli is tender.
- Carefully transfer mixture to a blender and puree until smooth. Season with salt and pepper. Pour mixture into a bowl and place in an ice bath to chill until ready to serve.
- To serve, cook gnocchi according to directions. Meanwhile, warm broccoli sauce in a small saucepan. Remove gnocchi with a slotted spoon and place on a serving dish. Spoon sauce over gnocchi and garnish with cheese and croutons.

Gnocchi ("nyo key") is the Italian word for dumplings; in Italian, gnocchi is the plural of gnocco, which literally means "lump." Gnocchi may also be purchased frozen, fresh, or dried.

Ricotta Gnocchi

Yield: 6 servings: 4 ounces

1 pound	Ricotta
3/4 cup	All purpose flour plus more for dusting the board
1 each	Egg
1/3 cup	Parmesan cheese, finely grated
1 teaspoon	Salt
1/2 teaspoon	White pepper, freshly ground

- Place ricotta in a bowl with a small amount of flour. Add 3/4 cup flour, egg, parmesan, and seasonings. Using your hands, gently knead together until mixture is combined. The dough will be quite wet and sticky at this point.

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size (238g)
Servings Per Container 6

Amount Per Serving		% Daily Value*	
Calories 360	Calories from Fat 180		
Total Fat 20g			31%
Saturated Fat 10g			50%
Trans Fat 0g			
Cholesterol 90mg			30%
Sodium 720mg			30%
Total Carbohydrate 25g			8%
Dietary Fiber 2g			8%
Sugars 1g			
Protein 19g			
Vitamin A 20%	Vitamin C 40%		
Calcium 35%	Iron 10%		

*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
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Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
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Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

- Set dough aside, dust dough board or countertop with flour. Cut off a small piece of the dough and roll into a 3/4 inch thick tube, cut in 1 inch sections and transfer to a floured sheet pan. Repeat until all the dough is rolled and cut.
- Refrigerate until ready to cook. Gnocchi may be frozen if not cooked immediately.
- To cook, gently drop a few of the gnocchi into salted simmering water in a large pot until they float, about 1 to 2 minutes. Carefully remove with a slotted spoon and place on plate or serving dish. Serve immediately.

**These recipes have not been standardized for use in child nutrition programs.*