

With Low-Fat Sauce, Pasta is Healthy Choice

Tallahassee Democrat

Judy Corbus, Extension Agent, Washington/Holmes Counties Extension Service—Family & Consumer Sciences

Looking for main dishes that are nutritious, easy, and inexpensive? Consider the possibilities with pasta! Pasta is made from durum wheat and comes in a variety of shapes and sizes. Enriched pasta provides iron, several B-vitamins, and folic acid for added nutrition. Many popular pasta varieties also are available in whole wheat; one cup of whole wheat pasta can provide up to 25 percent of the recommended daily fiber requirements.

“But doesn’t pasta make you fat?” Often, the culprit is the topping we choose – thick, creamy sauces can add fat grams and calories that can contribute to weight gain if we don’t engage in an active lifestyle. Light, thin sauces, such as marinara, or reduced fat/low-fat versions of alfredo sauce make for a healthy, flavorful meal. Start with broths, vegetables, or vegetable purees as a base instead of cream and butter. Try different spices and fresh herbs to add interest and flavor. Experiment with ingredients that simulate the texture of fat - without the fat. For example, puree two large peeled, roasted eggplants with half the ricotta cheese in your favorite lasagna recipe for a lighter dish.

“Which pasta should I use?” A good rule of thumb is the lighter and more delicate the pasta, the lighter and thinner the sauce. Angel hair or thin spaghetti is best paired with a thin sauce, like marinara. Thicker pasta shapes, like fettuccine, work well with creamier sauces. Pasta shapes with holes or ridges, like mostaccioli or radiatore, are excellent choices for chunkier sauces.

“How do I measure pasta?” In general, eight ounces uncooked small to medium pasta shapes, such as elbow macaroni, medium shells, twists, spirals, wagon wheels, bow ties, penne, or ziti, yields four cups cooked. Eight ounces uncooked long pasta shapes (1 1/2-inch diameter bunch), such as spaghetti, angel hair, linguine, vermicelli, or fettuccine, yields four cups cooked. Eight ounces uncooked egg noodles yields 2 1/2 cups cooked.

“How do I cook pasta?” Boil four to six quarts of water for one pound of dry pasta. Add the pasta with a stir and return the water to a boil. Stir the pasta occasionally during cooking. Follow package directions for cooking times. If the pasta is to be used as part of a dish that requires further cooking, undercook the pasta by 1/3 of the cooking time listed on the package. Taste the pasta to determine if it is done. Perfectly cooked pasta should be “al dente” or firm to the bite, yet cooked through. Drain pasta immediately and follow the rest of the recipe. Rinse after draining only if you are using it in a cold dish, such as pasta salad, or when you are not going to sauce and serve it immediately. Rinse the pasta under cold water to stop the cooking process and drain well.

Pasta can be part of a healthy diet and offers many meal options. Pasta can be topped with leftovers - cooked vegetables, ground meat, chicken, or even a small amount of vegetable soup. Add leftover pasta to your favorite soup. If you use dry pasta, simmer the soup for an additional 5 to 10 minutes or until the pasta is cooked. Pairing pasta with legumes, such as beans and lentils, or low-fat dairy products makes for protein-rich, but inexpensive and delicious meatless meals. Let your creative juices flow!

Source: National Pasta Association, <http://www.ilovepasta.org/index.html>

If you have a question, write to Judy Corbus, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, University of Florida/IFAS Washington and Holmes Counties Extension, 1424 Jackson Avenue, Suite A, Chipley, FL 32428;

or call the Extension Office, (850) 638-6265, (TDD, via University of Florida, 352-846-1046) between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

University of Florida/IFAS Extension is an Equal Employment Opportunity – Affirmative Action Employer authorized to provide research, educational information, and other services only to individuals and institutions that function without regard to race, color, gender, or national origin.