

# Nutrition

## fact sheet



**P**asta is one of America's favorite foods. That's good news, because pasta fits easily into a healthy eating plan *and* satisfies your appetite for good taste, convenience, and nutrition. It's also perfect for an active lifestyle. The best part of all: When you combine pasta with other healthy ingredients, it's easy to create delicious meals that meet your nutrient needs.

## The Pasta Meal: Italy's Nutrient Powerhouse

### *Pasta's Place at the Plate*

It's easy to see why our enjoyment of pasta continues — it's convenient, easy-to-prepare, and offers countless possibilities for delicious, healthy meals.

Pasta is very versatile served either as a main course or side dish.

Combining pasta with other healthy ingredients provides nutrients that are essential for good health, such as vitamins, minerals, carbohydrates, proteins and fats. Healthy pasta "partners" include vegetables, fish, seafood, poultry, lean meat, beans, tomato sauce and olive oil. A pasta meal is also a tasty way to get specific nutrients the typical American diet may be lacking — calcium, potassium, fiber, magnesium, and vitamins A, C and E. When you combine pasta with fish such as salmon, you'll even get a healthy dose of omega-three fatty acids, which may help protect against heart disease.

Pasta also fits well with the recommendation to get the most nutrition out of the calories you eat.

The 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, a set of recommendations from the U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services, suggest at least half of your daily grain servings come from whole grains. For the remaining half, you may choose enriched grain foods that include pasta, rice and certain breads and cereals. Remember, variety is a key part of any healthy eating plan.

### *What Carbohydrates Do for You*

Carbohydrate-rich foods are a critical part of nutrition and an active lifestyle. In fact, they are the preferred source of fuel for your body. Whether you enjoy brisk morning walks or an evening workout at the gym, your muscles need the energy supplied by carbohydrates. What's more, the glucose (sugar) supplied by carbohydrates provides much-needed fuel for your brain.

### *Enjoy Healthy Eating with Pasta*

Pasta is a grain food that is low in fat and very low in sodium. Enriched grain foods like pasta are a good source of thiamin, folic acid, iron,

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## Information

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riboflavin and niacin. A ½ cup serving of cooked spaghetti contains only about 100 calories.

### *Portion Control is Crucial*

Consider 1 to 1 ½ cups cooked pasta an appropriate main dish portion — the equivalent of 2–3 servings of grain foods. Restaurants may offer as much as five or six times this amount, often with generous additions of high-fat sauces. Keeping this in mind, fill your plate with a proper portion of your favorite pasta, and include larger helpings of healthy pasta partners such as vegetables. Most importantly, take the time to enjoy your meals and, whenever possible, share them with family and friends.

### *Pasta Meal Combinations*

Try a few of these delicious suggestions for serving up pasta:

- Add leftover pasta to your favorite soup. If dry pasta is used, simmer the soup for an additional five minutes or until the pasta is cooked.
- For a refreshing change from sandwiches at lunch, simply add tuna, chopped vegetables and reduced-fat Italian dressing to cooked pasta.
- Think texture as well as flavor. Add toasted pine nuts or toasted chopped walnuts to linguini or angel hair pasta, then toss with a little olive oil, parmesan cheese, and fresh basil or chives.
- Pasta comes in many shapes and sizes. Introduce toddlers and children to different, fun pasta shapes by serving shells, bow ties (farfalle), flowers (fiori) or rotini (spirals) with a tomato-based sauce.

### *Penne with Spring Vegetables*

Preparation Time: 10 minutes Serves: 6

Cooking Time: 20 minutes

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil

½ cup chopped onion

2 cloves garlic, minced

1 lb. asparagus, trimmed, cut into 1-inch pieces

2-½ cups (12 oz.) cherry tomatoes, halved

2 cups diced yellow squash

¾ cup fat-free chicken broth

⅛ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

⅛ tsp. salt (optional)

1 box (16 oz.) penne pasta

6 fresh basil leaves, cut into thin strips

¼ cup parmesan cheese (optional)

1. Heat oil in large skillet over medium heat. Add onion and garlic; cook 3 minutes, stirring frequently. Add asparagus; cook 3 minutes. Add tomatoes and squash; cook 3 minutes or until tomatoes are softened. Add chicken broth; reduce heat to simmer and continue cooking 5 minutes. Season with pepper, and if desired, salt.
2. Cook pasta according to package directions; drain. Add pasta and basil to vegetable mixture; toss to combine. Serve with freshly grated parmesan cheese, if desired.

### *Nutrition Information (per serving):*

400 calories; 11 g. fat; 1.5 g. saturated fat; 7 g. monounsaturated fat, 2 g. polyunsaturated fat; 0 mg. cholesterol; 60 mg. sodium; 65 g. carbohydrate; 5 g. fiber; 13 grams protein; 404 mg. potassium; 15% DV vitamin A; 30% DV vitamin C; 20% DV iron