



EATING THE ITALIAN WAY



Eat, Live, Be Italian! Pasta Fact Sheet

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Obesity in America

- The latest data from the National Center for Health Statistics shows that 30 percent of U.S. adults 20 years of age and older (over 60 million people) are obese.
- High obesity rates raise concern because of their implications for health. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of many diseases and health conditions, including the following:
 - Hypertension
 - Dyslipidemia (for example, high total cholesterol or high levels of triglycerides)
 - Type 2 diabetes
 - Coronary heart disease
 - Stroke
 - Gallbladder disease
 - Osteoarthritis
 - Sleep apnea and respiratory problems
 - Some cancers (endometrial, breast, and colon)

Italians and Health

- Italians enjoy the staples of the Mediterranean diet and have far lower rates of heart disease, colon cancer and obesity than Americans.
- According to a poll sponsored by the Union of Italian Pasta Producers, over half of Italians interviewed eat pasta every day. But pasta is generally one of several courses in a typical Italian meal. So although per capita pasta consumption in Italy is four times as much as in the United States. Italians actually eat less pasta at a single sitting than do Americans, who tend to eat it only once or twice a week.
- Italians also tend to lead less sedentary lives. Walking is a necessity not just in cities but also in smaller towns where cars are usually banned from the center of town. Also, many people live in walkups, and elevators are usually found only in high-rises.

Pasta and a Healthy Diet

- According to the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, **Choose carbohydrates wisely** — Grain foods: At least half our daily grain servings should come from whole grains; however, the rest may come from enriched grain products, such as pasta. It is important to make a variety of grain foods the foundation of your diet.
- A serving of pasta is defined on the Nutrition Facts label as approximately 1 cup cooked (1/2 cup uncooked). This is equal to two USDA Dietary Guidelines servings. One cup of cooked pasta contains 200 calories, with little or no fat. However, most pasta dishes in restaurants are served as platters, not portions — therefore a typical restaurant serving of spaghetti can amount to 12 to 16 servings, according to the USDA.
- Pasta is a healthy food that can be part of a healthy diet, especially when eaten in appropriate portions and prepared with healthy accompaniments, such as vegetables, fish, tomatoes, and olive oil. As with any food, a balance of healthy combinations is optimal for maintaining good health.
- Pasta is a good source of thiamin, folic acid, iron, riboflavin, and niacin. Pasta is very low in sodium and is cholesterol-free.
- Pasta is an important part of the classic Mediterranean diet, which was hailed for its health benefits in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Pasta Research Findings

- Researchers found that people who switch from a low-fat diet to one that contains more fat but equal calories do not gain weight. In one study, almost three times as many subjects stuck with a Mediterranean-style diet compared to those on a low-fat regimen -- and were more likely to keep the weight off after the study was over. What's critical is controlling portions.
- Other evidence has de-emphasized the role of refined grains in contributing to the health benefits associated with the Mediterranean diet. A study published in the *European Journal of Nutrition* noted: "A Mediterranean diet (emphasizing olive oil, fiber, fruits, vegetables, fish and alcohol and reduced meat/meat products) can be an effective measure for reducing the risk of myocardial infarction. However, study results support the exclusion of refined cereals with a high glycemic load as healthy elements of this pattern."
- A 2003 study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that the Mediterranean diet reduces the risk of death from heart disease and cancer. Cereals, which include pasta, are an integral part of the diet, as reported in the study findings.
- A 2001 study published in the *Journal of the New York Academy of Sciences* compared the diet in the village of Nicotera in southern Italy of the 1960's (which was factored into the development of the Mediterranean Diet Pyramid), with the villagers' diet in 1996. Food choices differed markedly between 1960 and 1996. Consumption of animal foods increased, as did that of cakes, pies and cookies, and sweet beverages in both male and female groups. The study found increases in risk of death from cancer due to increased consumption of meat and dairy and decreased consumption of pasta and other cereals, with a strong correlation between decreased pasta and bread consumption (down 20%) and increased risk of colon and breast cancer.¹

¹ de Lorenzo A, Andreoli A, Sorge RP, Iacopino L, Montagna S, Promenzio L, Serrano P. Modification of dietary habits (Mediterranean diet) and cancer mortality in a southern Italian village from 1960 to 1996. *Ann N Y Acad Sci.* 1999;889:224-9.