

Pasta

Italian cuisine
and health



What the science says

Pasta

Pasta is one of the most iconic Italian foods and one of the elements that best expresses the nutritional principles of Italian cuisine. Available in numerous regional variations, it is much more than just a source of carbohydrates: it forms the basis of an infinite variety of dishes that make the most of different ingredients and help to create balanced, varied meals consistent with the principles of the Mediterranean Diet.

Versatility and pairings

see → “What do you eat it with?”

One of pasta's main strengths is its remarkable versatility. Italian culinary tradition has progressively associated it with vegetables, pulses, fish, aromatic herbs, extra virgin olive oil and, on occasion, meat and cheese, creating dishes that combine foods from different groups.

Dishes such as pasta and beans, pasta and chickpeas, pasta with tomato sauce, pasta with sardines and orecchiette with turnip greens, as well as numerous regional vegetable-based recipes, are proof that pasta represents the perfect combination of the distinctive elements of Italian cuisine, helping to create nutritionally complete meals.

Nutrition

see → “What does it provide?”

Pasta is primarily made up of complex carbohydrates, which are the main recommended source of energy within a balanced diet, for both the general population and specific groups, including

athletes. Another distinctive feature is its generally medium-to-low glycaemic index, which is lower than that of many other starchy foods, thanks partly to the particular structure of pasta, which makes starch less readily accessible to digestive enzymes.

In addition to supplying carbohydrates, pasta also provides a source of plant-based protein, and its value in Italian cuisine cannot be interpreted separately but must be considered within the context of the dishes in which it is used.

Combining it with pulses improves the overall protein quality of the meal, while pairing it with vegetables increases the intake of fibre, vitamins and bioactive compounds. The use of extra virgin olive oil helps to enrich the nutritional profile and enhances the bioavailability of various fat-soluble compounds.

Affordability and territories

see → “Benefits”

Pasta is also affordable, a characteristic that has favoured its widespread popularity across all social classes over the centuries and still contributes to a balanced diet today, even when financial resources are limited.

The richness of Italian cuisine is also reflected in the extraordinary variety of pasta shapes and preparations. From the fresh pasta of northern Italy to the dried pasta of the south, through to the numerous regional specialities, every area has developed recipes linked to local produce, agricultural traditions and seasonal availability.

This gastronomic biodiversity highlights the ability of Italian cuisine to adapt to different regional contexts, making the most of local resources without sacrificing its core principles of balance. When integrated into a varied, plant-rich diet and consumed in the recommended portions, pasta continues to be one of the foods that best expresses Italian cuisine's ability to combine simplicity, affordability, tradition and nutritional quality.

What the science says

see → “Is it fattening?”

The belief that eating pasta inevitably leads to weight gain is not supported by current scientific evidence.

Body weight depends on the overall balance between calories eaten and calories burned, and on the overall quality of the diet, rather than on the consumption of any one food.

As part of a balanced diet inspired by the principles of the Mediterranean Diet, pasta is one of the main sources of complex carbohydrates and can contribute to the nutritional quality of the diet, particularly when combined with pulses, vegetables, extra virgin olive oil and other traditional Italian dishes.

Overall, available epidemiological studies show that regular consumption of pasta, as part of a balanced diet, is not associated with an increased risk of becoming overweight or obese.

However, the associations observed may vary depending on the quantities consumed, preparation methods, condiments used and the overall dietary context.



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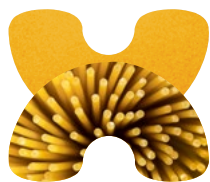
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The full text of the *Handbook on Italian cuisine* is available online. Scan the code.

What does it provide?

Pasta is primarily a source of carbohydrates, in the form of starch which, thanks to the compact structure of the pasta, is digested gradually. It also contains a good amount of plant-based protein.



Complex carbohydrates

The main source of energy.



Plant-based protein

A source of plant-based protein.

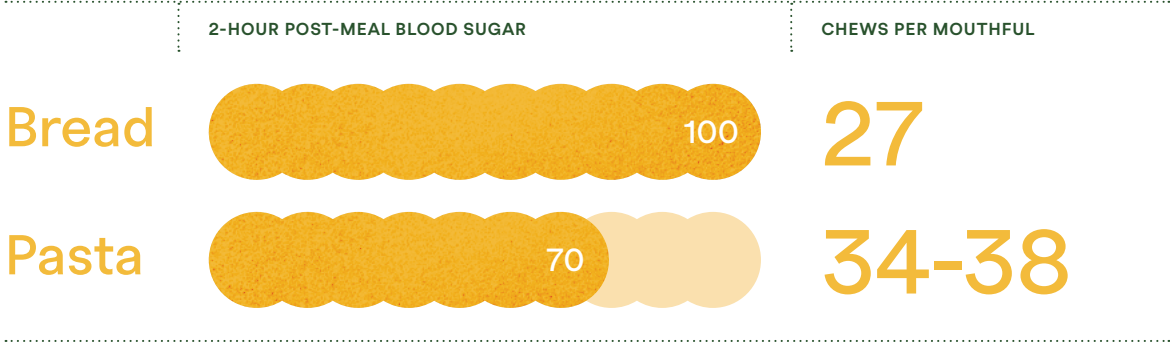


Medium-to-low glycaemic index

The compact structure slows down the digestion of starch.

Pasta versus bread

*Same flour, same amount of carbohydrates (50 g).



30 healthy adults. Compact pasta requires more chewing and releases starch more slowly: the glycaemic response is lower. Source ⑥

Benefits

Integrated into a varied, plant-rich diet in the recommended portions.



Energy, also for athletes

Eating 5 or more portions of pasta a week helps maintain strength and performance (study conducted on 13 amateur athletes). Source ②



Complete meals

It combines different food groups on the same plate.



Affordable

Pasta is affordable, contributing to a balanced diet even even with limited financial resources.

What do you eat it with?

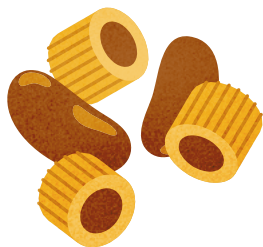
Traditional pairings

Traditionally

Often with vegetables, pulses, fish, aromatic herbs and extra virgin olive oil. Occasionally with meat and cheese.

Examples of dishes

Pasta and beans
Pasta and chickpeas
Pasta with tomato sauce
Pasta with sardines
Orecchiette with turnip greens



Pasta + Pulses

Improves the protein quality of the meal.



Pasta + Vegetables

More fibre, vitamins and bioactive compounds.



Pasta + cheese + extra virgin olive oil

Promotes the absorption of fat-soluble compounds.

Is it fattening?

What the science says

No, if incorporated into a balanced diet.

-0.63 kg

In approx. 12 weeks

Low-glycaemic index diets including pasta: -0.63 kg in approx. 12 weeks versus diets with a higher glycaemic index. Source ^①

-10%

During a 6-month low-calorie diet

In 49 people with obesity: 10% weight loss with pasta 5+ times a week, 7% weight loss with pasta 3 times or less. No significant difference. Source ^④

BMI ↓

Lower in those who eat more pasta

In relation to body weight, pasta consumption is associated with a lower Body Mass Index (BMI). Source ^⑤

Body weight depends on the balance between calories eaten and calories burned, and on the overall quality of the diet.

Key factors

Quantity — Preparation — Condiments — Overall quality of diet



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