

## National Pasta Association

### National Nutrition Month Dietitian Toolkit



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### March is National Nutrition Month!

During National Nutrition Month, the National Pasta Association and Share the Pasta are committed to amplifying the message of the benefits of pasta, including its nutritional value and versatility with various nutritious foods.

Join us in sharing content throughout the month of March as it relates to nutrition guidance, healthy pasta meals, Mediterranean Diet information, pasta research, and more.

Looking for a Share the Pasta resource that's not included in the below? Reach out to Danielle Meyer at [DMeyer@kellencompany.com](mailto:DMeyer@kellencompany.com)!

## Welcome Letter



Dear Dietitian,

For centuries pasta has been a favorite food and meal staple in cuisines all over the world. Here in the US it is a comfort food, well-loved by young and old that appeals to a wide range of lifestyles, budgets and cultures due to its versatility, ease of preparation, availability and cost-effectiveness. At no time was pasta's culinary importance more apparent than during the COVID-19 pandemic when popularity soared and the industry experienced a surge in unprecedented growth.

According to a recent National Pasta Association (NPA) survey, 73% of participants said they ate pasta at least once a week. Furthermore, the Grain Foods Foundation surveyed over 1,000 US adults representing a cross-section of the population, and found approximately one-third of US consumers named pasta (36 percent) as a comforting food during times of stress. Beyond this emotional and social connection, pasta is a healthy, nutritious food, which provides many dietary benefits. In fact, pasta is a mainstay in healthy diets like the Mediterranean diet, vegetarian diets and plant-based diets.

To help you spread the good news about pasta, we've compiled all the tools you need to teach consumers how pasta can fit into a healthy diet. Here you will find:

- The latest research on pasta and diet quality
- Why Eating Pasta is Good for You Infographic
- Pasta and the new 2020 Dietary Guidelines – what you need to know
- Tips for including more plant-based foods in the diet
- Making the most of the Mediterranean Diet
- Five reasons why parents (and kids) love pasta!
- Healthy pasta recipes
- Social posts and graphics
- Nutrition tip sheet and pasta FAQ's

Are you a pasta aficionado? Do you love pasta for the positive nutritional value it brings to the diet as well as for its great taste and versatility? If you want to spread the word about the pasta and learn more about the healthy attributes it provides to the diet, why not consider becoming a NPA Ambassador. If you're interested please visit our website [here](#).

For more information about pasta recipes, research or other resources please visit [sharethepasta.org](http://sharethepasta.org) or feel free to reach out me directly at [dwelland@kellencompany.com](mailto:dwelland@kellencompany.com).

Sincerely,  
Diane Welland MS, RD

## The Good News About Pasta – The Latest Pasta Research Email Template

Research published in *Frontiers in Nutrition* in 2020, analyzed the diets of adults and children who eat pasta and revealed great news about one of America's favorite foods. The research found that pasta consumption in both children and adults is associated with a better diet quality and better nutrient intakes than that of adults and children who do not eat pasta. Additionally, when evaluating weight parameters, no associations were observed in male adults and children. In adult women however, pasta-eaters showed a beneficial weight-related outcome. Pasta consumption in adult females was associated with reduced waist circumference, body weight and body mass index (BMI).

The research, "[Pasta Consumption is Linked to Greater Nutrient Intakes and Improved Diet Quality in American Children and Adults, and Beneficial Weight-Related Outcomes Only in Adult](#)

Females” was conducted by Nutritional Strategies, Inc. on behalf of the National Pasta Association. The study examined associations between pasta consumption, shortfall nutrient intakes as defined by the 2015 Dietary Guidelines (2015 DG) and diet quality in comparison to non-pasta consumption in the U.S. population (children (ages 2-18) and adults (> 19 years). Pasta consumption was defined as all dry domestic and imported pasta/noodle varieties made with only wheat and no egg. From the analysis, researchers identified a number of key positive nutritional dietary patterns associated with those who eat pasta as part of their diet compared to those who don’t eat pasta.

In adults they found:

- **Better overall diet quality (based on USDA Healthy Eating Index-2010 scale)**
- **Greater intake of key shortfall nutrients**
  - **folate, iron, magnesium, and dietary fiber**
- **Lower daily intakes**
  - **Saturated fat and added sugars**
- **No differences were seen in total daily calories and sodium intake.**
- **No significant associations were seen with body weight, waist circumference and body mass index adult men.**
- **In adult women (19 -50 years), pasta eating was associated with lower body weight and waist circumference.**

In children they found:

- **Better overall diet quality (based on USDA Healthy Eating Index-2010 scale)**
- **Greater intake of key shortfall nutrients**
  - **Folate, iron, magnesium, dietary fiber and vitamin E**
- **Lower daily intakes**
  - **Saturated fat and total fat**
- **No differences were seen in total daily calories and sodium intake.**
- **No significant associations were seen with body weight, waist circumference and body mass index.**

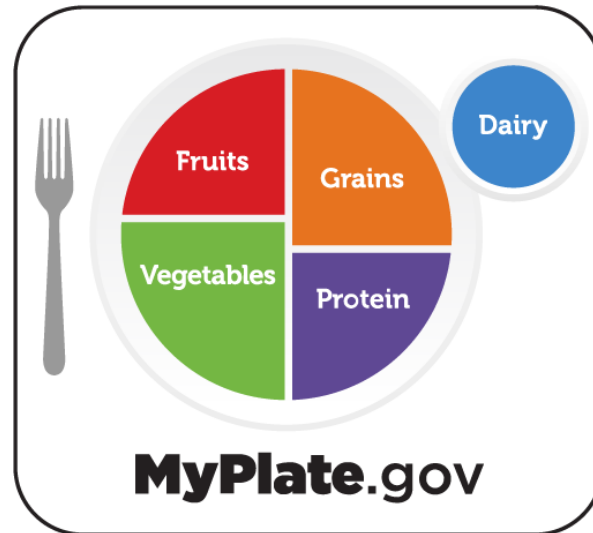
Pasta is a convenient, nutritious, easy-to-prepare meal for both young and old and pleases even the pickiest of eaters. It has long been celebrated as one of America’s favorite foods and is advocated by nutritionists for its good nutrition. For more information about pasta nutrition facts and healthy pasta recipes, visit [sharethepasta.org](http://sharethepasta.org).

## Why Eating Pasta is Good for You - Infographic

Why Eating Pasta is Good for You Infographic:

- [Blog on Share the Pasta website](#)
- [Document to download and share](#)

## Pasta and the Dietary Guidelines



### Pasta and the New 2020 Dietary Guidelines – What You Need to Know

The new [2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans](#) (DGA) are science-based recommendations designed to encourage Americans of all ages – birth to older age — to choose healthy and enjoyable foods and beverages that promote health and prevent disease.

When it comes to grain foods, the guidelines recommend making at least half of your grain intake whole grains. They also focus on increasing nutrient-dense foods and limiting foods and beverages higher in added sugars, saturated fat, and sodium in all food groups. Pasta provides the perfect vehicle for helping you increase healthy, nutrient-dense foods like vegetables, beans and legumes, lean meats and low-fat cheeses in the diet. Consider healthy recipes from Share the Pasta like [Chicken Pasta Power Bowls with Avocado Dressing](#), [Lemon Garlic Pasta with Grilled Veggies](#) or [Vegetarian Pho](#) – the possibilities are endless.

There is also a greater emphasis on dietary patterns and flexibility based on lifestyle, personal preferences, culture and income level. In addition to being cost-effective, pasta is extremely versatile. There are dozens of types, shapes and sizes of pasta which can be matched with almost any cuisine, sauce, vegetable or protein.

Whether whole grain or not, pasta is a healthy food that remains an important part of a wholesome nutritious diet and can easily fit into a healthy diet. In fact, pasta is cited in all three of the healthy dietary patterns mentioned in the guidelines – the US Healthy style, the Mediterranean-style and the Vegetarian-style diet.

The new Dietary Guidelines recommend selecting healthy foods that you love, are good for you, and can also be easily incorporated into your everyday diet. What better way to do this than with pasta!

## Tips for Adding More Plant Based Foods To Your Diet

Eating a plant-based diet doesn't mean you have to give up meat and dairy. But, it does require making a conscious effort to choose more foods from plant sources every day. In addition to fruits and vegetables, plant-based eating also emphasizes grain foods like pasta, nuts, seeds, oils, legumes, lentils and beans. Here are some tips for getting started:

- *Consider where you are starting from* – for some people, increasing more plant foods in the diet may mean simply adding a vegetable to their dinner every night. Others may opt for vegan cuisine. Think of including more plant foods in the diet as a journey that may take some time to achieve. For help starting out why not try [Chicken Pasta with Butternut Squash Caramelized Onions and Tart Cherries](#).



- *Make Mediterranean-style meals* – Mediterranean cuisine naturally emphasizes whole fresh vegetables and beans. While seafood, cheese, eggs and poultry are included in the diet they are not the stars. Pasta is central to many Mediterranean dishes and featured in many recipes like this [Italian Pasta with Chickpeas](#). For more recipes on Mediterranean cooking check out our recipes [here](#).



- *Think of meat as a side dish or garnish* – In the US most of our meals center around a large portion of protein. Plant-based diets however, use protein like a flavoring ingredient or garnish. In fact, many plant-based dishes have no more than 2-4 ounces of protein per person, consider this [Shrimp, Penne with Olives, Red Pepper and Artichokes](#).



- *Go meatless at least one night a week* – It's easy to bump up plant-based foods when you cook a vegetarian meal. One way to do this is to substitute the meat for a vegetable such as in this [Grilled Summer Vegetable Lasagna](#). Another option is to look to international cuisines for inspiration. For example, many Asian-inspired dishes like this [Sesame Noodles with Tofu and Vegetables](#) are plant-centered.



- *Build a meal around a salad* – Main dish salads filled with a variety of lettuces and greens like kale, spinach, Romaine and even iceberg make a great base for other vegetables, fresh or dried fruits, nuts and plant proteins. Make salads pop with color and crunch by sprinkling with red pepper, carrots, radishes, lentils and pumpkin seeds or walnuts. Offering ingredients on the side allow each person to customize to their own liking. If you want to be more creative, try substituting whole grains for the greens, then boost protein with lean chicken, seafood or small amounts of cheese. You can even get creative in how you serve it, like this [Mason Jar Pasta Salad](#).





## Making the Most of the Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean Diet is characterized by an abundant variety of plant foods, including fruits, vegetables, breads, pasta, cereals, whole grains, potatoes, beans, lentils, nuts, and seeds. Olive oil is the principle source of fat in this diet, and fish, especially fatty fish is a mainstay. Dairy products (mostly cheese and yogurt) and poultry are eaten in low to moderate amounts, and eggs (as many as four) often appear on the weekly menu. Red meat is eaten only on occasion – a few times a month – and wine, although consumed regularly, is normally eaten with food and in modest amounts (no more than a small glass or two).

The Mediterranean diet is also one of the healthiest diets around. Study after study shows following a Mediterranean style diet has benefits ranging from reducing the risk of [heart disease](#), [cancer](#), and even [depression](#).

Pasta is a central ingredient to Mediterranean cooking and a great way to introduce healthy Mediterranean style dishes to a variety of audiences. Not only is pasta familiar, well-liked, inexpensive, and easy to prepare, it is an ideal way to highlight and incorporate other lesser known plant-based Mediterranean ingredients like lentils, beans, eggplant and peppers. Furthermore, pasta is a perfect starting point for teaching the tenets of the Mediterranean diet. Consider these interesting Mediterranean pasta meals: [Tomato, Fennel and Sardine Linguini](#), [Whole Wheat Orzo with Tabouleh](#) and [Greek Pasta Salad](#).



## Five Reasons Why Parents (and Kids) Love Pasta!

Reason 1: ***Pasta can help improve diet quality*** – According to [new research](#) published in *Frontiers in Nutrition*, kids who ate pasta had higher Healthy Eating Index scores (several points higher) than those kids that didn't eat pasta. This means that pasta-eating was associated with better quality diets overall and pasta eaters were more likely to meet US Dietary Guideline recommendations.

Reason 2: ***Pasta-eaters have better nutrient intakes*** - In children, [research shows](#) pasta-eaters have greater intake of key hard-to-get nutrients like folate, iron, magnesium, dietary fiber and vitamin E than non-pasta eaters. One reason for this could be that pasta is a perfect vehicle for pairing with high fiber, nutrient-dense vegetables, lean meats and beans which are high in important vitamins, minerals and fiber.

Reason 3: ***Pasta provides energy*** – pasta is considered a complex carbohydrate, so it is absorbed and digested more slowly than simple carbohydrates. Not only does it provide excellent energy for physical activity and sports but carbohydrates are also the main source of energy for your brain. Although the [brain](#) represents only 2% of your body weight, it needs more than 20% of the body's daily energy to function.

Reason 4: ***Pasta doesn't make you fat*** - [Pasta isn't likely to pack](#) on the pounds if you offer the appropriate portions. In fact, [research shows](#) there were no significant differences in BMI, waist circumference and body weight in pasta eaters compared to non-pasta eaters. According to the USDA, a ½ cup serving of cooked pasta like spaghetti contains less than 100 calories, less than a half gram of fat and less than 5 milligrams of sodium. If there are concerns about weight and calorie intake, replace heavy sauces with vegetable-based versions or just a drizzle of olive oil or swap out ½ to ¼ of the pasta in a recipe for the same amount of vegetables or beans.

Reason 5: ***Pasta is fun to eat*** – There's no question pasta is just plain fun to eat, particularly for little hands. Explore different [pasta sizes and shapes](#) and pair pasta with colorful vegetables, like red peppers, broccoli and zucchini and interesting sauces. Get kids involved in the prepping and cooking process and healthy pasta meals can be easy and delicious too!



## Healthy Pasta Recipes To Share

Healthy Recipes – [Images available here](#)

- [Healthy Stuffed Shells](#)
- [Kale and Asparagus Shrimp Scampi](#)
- [Lemony Grilled Calamari Ziti](#)
- [Healthy Chicken Parmigiana](#)
- [Linguine with Shrimp](#)
- [Warm Moroccan Spiced Couscous Salad](#)
- [Mushroom and Kale Pesto Pasta with Toasted Hazelnuts](#)
- [Sesame Noodles with Tofu and Vegetables](#)

[All other recipes available on SharethePasta.org](#)

## Social Posts and Graphics

### Sample Social Media Posts:

- March is National Nutrition Month and pasta is the perfect addition to a healthy diet. Consider adding a load of fresh veggies to your next pasta meal and you are all set. Try

this Lemon-Garlic Pasta with Asparagus courtesy of @sharethepasta:

<http://bit.ly/3rMuK9c> #NationalNutritionMonth

- Here's a pasta nutrition fact from @sharethepasta in honor of #NationalNutritionMonth: Carbs are not a bad thing! In fact, your brain needs 130 grams a day of carbs to function properly. Plus, these nutrients produce serotonin, which helps to balance your emotions. Learn more: <http://bit.ly/3aUi7BT>
- Did you know? Collectively, the U.S. consumes 5.95 billion pounds of pasta per year. Learn more at [sharethepasta.org](http://sharethepasta.org). #NationalNutritionMonth
- Pasta tastes great and is healthy for you too! Read the latest pasta research from @sharethepasta which details how pasta eaters have a better diet quality than non-pasta eaters: <http://bit.ly/37vufZk> #NationalNutritionMonth
- Pasta is a great option for vegetarian diets! Whip up this Vegetable and Herb Lasagna for dinner tonight to enjoy the flavors of eggplant and zucchini and feel great about what you're eating too! <https://bit.ly/2NuyqWP> @sharethepasta #NationalNutritionMonth
- Looking for a vegan and dairy-free pasta meal to fit into your dietary needs? No problem – pasta is versatile! Enjoy this dairy-free penne alla vodka from @sharethepasta. <https://bit.ly/3qb1R5R> #NationalNutritionMonth
- #NationalNutritionMonth pasta fact from @sharethepasta: One cup of cooked pasta contains under 200 calories, in addition to fiber, vitamins and minerals. It also fills you up so you don't feel hungry while trying to lose weight. Learn more about pasta's low glycemic index and what that means for weight loss and maintenance: <http://bit.ly/2Zev0kJ>
- Pasta can be the perfect option for a healthy snack! Try these Pastina Pasta, Lemon and Dill Stuffed Cucumber Cups the next time you go to reach for the chips or cookies. <http://bit.ly/3rHh2UU> #NationalNutritionMonth @sharethpasta
- The Mediterranean Diet is characterized by various plant-based foods, including fruits, vegetables, lentils, nuts, and yes, pasta! There are many health benefits associated with the Mediterranean Diet, including reduced risk of death from heart disease and cancer, and pasta serves as the perfect staple in it! Learn more: <http://bit.ly/3p9DmVr> #NationalNutritionMonth @sharethepasta

#### Social posting tips:

- Be sure to use #NationalNutritionMonth in all relevant posts throughout the month of March.
- For Instagram, feel free to utilize other relevant hashtags like #pasta, #pastarecipe, #MediterraneanDiet #carbs #healthyrecipe, #noodles, #pastameal and #SharethePasta
- Note several other days in March are "National Food Days" that you can tie National Nutrition Month posts into. These include:
  - March 9: National Meatball Day
  - March 11: National "Eat Your Noodles" Day

- March 13: National Chicken Noodle Soup Day
- March 20: National Ravioli Day
- Feel free to use Share the Pasta's recipes or substitute your own company's recipes wherever you see fit.
- Tag @SharethePasta in your posts and NPA staff will re-share posts on Share the Pasta's channels.

[Social Graphics – to download and share](#)

## Nutrition Tip Sheet and Pasta FAQs

### Facts about Pasta

- The 2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommend consuming 45% to 65% of your total calories from carbohydrates.
- Pasta, a staple of the [Mediterranean Diet](#), is an excellent source of complex carbohydrates.
- Complex carbohydrates are the main source of energy for the body and are released slowly and steadily through the day.
- Pasta is a fat-free, low sodium food.
- A two-ounce serving of pasta is equivalent to one cup of cooked pasta. One cup of cooked pasta contains just 200 calories, in addition to valuable fiber, vitamins and minerals.
- Pasta has a low glycemic index (GI), which means it does not cause sugar in the blood to rise quickly. Thus foods with a low GI have a slower rate of digestion.
- The USDA Dietary Guidelines recommend that up to half of your intake of total grains come from whole grains.
- Pasta eaters have better quality diets than people who don't eat pasta. [New research](#) shows pasta consumption in both children and adults is associated with a better diet quality and better nutrient intakes than that of those adults and children who do not eat pasta.
- Pasta doesn't make you fat. [New research](#) shows pasta consumption was not associated with weight gain in male adults and children and in adult females was

- associated with reduced waist circumference, body weight and body mass index (BMI).
- White pasta is fortified with three major B vitamins (niacin, thiamin and riboflavin), iron and the B vitamin folic acid, which is critical in the prevention of some birth defects. In fact, enriched pasta contains six times more folic acid as its whole grain counterpart.
  - Combine ½ cup of cooked pasta with ½ cup of cooked vegetables and ½ cup of beans or 3 oz of a lean protein and ¼ cup of your favorite sauce for a quick, easy, healthy pasta meal.
  - The USDA Dietary Guidelines recommend that up to half of your intake of total grains come from whole grains.
  - Whole grain pasta is higher in fiber and certain micronutrients than enriched pasta. It is also slightly lower in carbohydrates and calories than enriched pasta.
  - Whole grain pasta can be made from whole wheat, brown rice, kamut, quinoa or any other whole grain.
  - For healthy adults, the greatest health benefits come from consuming approximately one three-ounce serving of whole grains daily (or three one-ounce servings).

Find more nutrition information and facts at these helpful resources:

<https://sharethepasta.org/pasta-nutrition/the-truth-about-carbs/>

<https://sharethepasta.org/pasta-101/types-of-pasta/>

<https://sharethepasta.org/pasta-nutrition/the-mediterranean-diet/>

<https://sharethepasta.org/cooking-pasta/tips/portion-sizes/>

<https://sharethepasta.org/pasta-nutrition/pasta-and-your-weight/>

<https://sharethepasta.org/pasta-101/pasta-1q/pasta-faqs/>