WHAT IS PASTA?

Pasta is food, and it is a delicious food.

Families all over the world eat pasta. Very often pasta is part of their main meal of the day.

Pasta is made from durum wheat semolina, which is mixed with water, made into shapes, and then dried.

Sometimes pasta may contain optional ingredients such as eggs or vegetables. These ingredients can be mixed into the dough before it is dried, like in the case of egg pasta, or they can be added as a filling, in the case of tortellini.

Pasta can be served with delicious foods and sauces such as tomatoes, olive oil, cheese, vegetables, fish, clams, shrimp, meat, and beans, so it tastes good too!

Pasta is made in many fun shapes. Some shapes are like long strings, such as spaghetti and linguini. There are hundreds of other different shapes including shells, ribbons, wagon wheels, bow ties, and stars. There are also filled pastas, such as tortellini, where the pasta is wrapped around meat, cheese, or vegetables.

HISTORY OF PASTA

Children and parents have eaten pasta for a very, very long time.

Wheat flour was one of the first foods of our distant ancestors. To make the flour, they crushed the kernels of wheat between two rocks.

Then they mixed the flour with water, and cooked it.

We know this from drawings they made on the walls of the ancient caves where they lived.

The ancestors of Italians, called Etruscans, made drawings that show them making a food from wheat that looks like pasta.

It was not very long after that the Romans made a food they called “lagana” which we now call “pasta.” The Romans traveled to many countries, carrying pasta with them, and taught other peoples how to make and cook pasta.
HOW IS PASTA MADE?

Pasta can be made two ways.

One way is by hand and is usually called “artisan pasta.” The other way is by machines, which make the and it is the pasta we buy in markets in boxes and packages.

For both of these ways, the first step is to grind the durum wheat kernels into semolina. This durum wheat semolina is then carefully mixed with water, pressed into pasta shapes, and dried.

If the pasta is made in factories, the expert pasta makers put the durum wheat semolina and water into one end of a huge machine (bigger than a house!). Then the pasta maker pushes the “start button,” and the machine goes to work. The pasta dough is forced through holes in the machine (called a die) that determine the shape of the pasta. Then, the shaped pasta goes through a drying process and after its completion, the dried pasta comes out the other end of the machine, and is ready to go into boxes and then to the market!

WHY IS PASTA GOOD FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES?

There are lots of really good reasons for eating pasta. Here are seven simple ones showing why pasta is a good food choice for children and their families.

1. Pasta is quick and easy to cook.
2. Pasta, and pasta meals, are delicious.
3. Pasta, and pasta meals, are nutritious, healthy foods.
4. Pasta is very flexible and convenient.
5. Pasta is not an expensive food.
6. Pasta can be served hot or cold.
7. Pasta can be served as a main dish or a side dish. It can also be served in soups, salads, and even in desserts!
WHY IS PASTA HEALTHY?

Thirty-four nutrition scientists from countries in different parts of the world met in Rome in 2004 to discuss pasta and health. After reviewing the most current nutrition science evidence, they prepared a consensus statement summarizing why pasta is a healthy food, and why it forms the basis of healthy meals. Their conclusions reported:

1. Pasta is a carbohydrate food, and carbohydrates are a key ingredient in healthy eating. Around the world, scientists and governments recommend that people divide their calories in this way: 45-60% from carbohydrates, 25-30% from fats, and 15-20% from proteins.

2. Pasta is a “good” carbohydrate. One key reason for this: the way pasta is made means that it is digested more slowly than many other foods. This is a health benefit because foods that are digested slowly help your body get the full nutrition benefits of those foods. Slow-release carbohydrates may also have benefits for healthy longevity as well as physical and cognitive performance. This means that eating pasta meals helps children to perform well at school and during their physical activities.

3. Pasta is usually eaten with other healthy foods, including olive oil, tomatoes, vegetables, cheese, beans, lean meats and fish. Many families think of pasta as a delicious, convenient and inexpensive way to deliver balanced healthy meals to their families.

4. Pasta does not cause weight gain. If you eat healthy-sized portions of pasta, you will not gain weight. Only if you eat too much of any of your foods will gain weight!

5. Pasta and pasta meals are part of healthy, traditional diets like the Mediterranean diet and the Latin American diet. These ways of eating are recommended by scientists around the world as very healthy.
How do you cook pasta?

Most of the time, pasta is cooked in boiling water. When it is done, the pasta is taken out of the water, drained, and then “dressed.” Dressing pasta meals means mixing it with wonderful sauces or other foods such as tomatoes, olive oil, fish, cheese, meat, or vegetables.

Pasta is often served in soups. Sometimes it is cooked right in the soup broth, and other times it is cooked in plain water, and added to the soup when it is almost finished. Pasta soups are very popular in the Americas. People in Mexico, Central and South American enjoy pasta in many different kinds of soups and stews. North Americans eat lots of chicken, beef or vegetable soups with pasta.

Some favorite pasta sauces are very simple (just olive oil or butter, a sprinkle of cheese, and salt and pepper).

Other delicious pasta sauces are more complicated. They include meat and fish sauces, vegetable sauces (especially tomato sauces), milk and cream sauces. Pasta dishes are sometimes fried and baked, too. Also, famous chefs often invent clever and exciting dishes with pasta for their restaurants!

Other interesting pasta facts!

🌳 There are more than 600 different pasta shapes made around the world.

 nhiên, America’s third President, is credited with bringing pasta to America in 1789.

‘Al dente’ is used to describe pasta when it is cooked to perfection. ‘Al dente’ in Italian literally means ”to the tooth.” Pasta that is al dente should not be overly firm, nor should it be overly soft.

The word ”pasta” comes from the Italian for paste, meaning a combination of durum wheat semolina and water.

Pasta existed for thousands of years before anyone ever thought to put tomato sauce on it. One reason is that tomatoes were not grown in Europe until the Spanish explorer Cortez brought them back to Europe from Mexico in 1519.

If Italians ate their average yearly amount of pasta in spaghetti shape (rather than a mix of pasta shapes) they would eat approximately 600,000,000 km of pasta – enough to wind around the earth 15,000 times!

Around the year 1000, the first documented recipe for pasta appeared in the book De arte Coquinaria per vermicelli e maccaroni siciliani (The Art of Cooking Sicilian Macaroni and Vermicelli), written by Martino Corno, chef to the powerful Patriarch of Aquileia.

In the 19th century, the industrial revolution and modern technology caused the production of pasta to be standardized and mechanized. This allowed pasta production to spread throughout Italy and surrounding nations, and soon afterwards to spread to the furthest corners of the globe. This made pasta one of the world’s best-known and enjoyed foods.