

spaghetti

pasta

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[Table of Contents](#)

spaghetti, thin, straight, cylindrical [pasta](#) of [Italian](#) origin, the most popular of all [pastas](#) eaten today.

Noodles made of wheat and eggs were known in the Mediterranean world in [antiquity](#), but the pasta we know as spaghetti—which takes its name from the Italian *spaghetto*, “little cord”—was probably introduced to [Sicily](#) by the island’s Arab conquerors in the 8th century. The name was first recorded in 1874, however, suggesting that spaghetti may have remained a regional dish until shortly after the unification of Italy. Spaghetti was likely eaten with butter and cheese until about that time too; although the tomato was introduced to [Italy](#) as part of the [Columbian Exchange](#), it was not widely eaten until the 19th century.

Made of [durum wheat](#), or [semolina](#), spaghetti is the most widely used of the “cord” pastas, which are cylindrical and solid. Related forms are spaghettini, which is a kind of particularly thin spaghetti, and vermicelli and angel hair pasta, which are thinner still. Spaghetti greatly outsells these other pastas. Italians eat about 24 kg (52 pounds) of dry pasta per capita annually, most in the form of spaghetti. Whereas Americans eat much less—about 9 kg (20 pounds) per capita per year—American [consumption](#) of carbohydrates is more problematic from a health standpoint, given that portion sizes are twice as large as those in Italy and that Italians are more inclined to walk than drive in the conduct of everyday life.


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Throughout Italy, spaghetti is often eaten with a simple tomato [sauce](#). In hot weather, southern Italians enjoy a dish called *spaghetti aglio e olio*, featuring a sauce of diced garlic lightly cooked in [olive oil](#), into which the cooked spaghetti is then tossed. Spaghetti lends itself to serving with small shellfish such as mussels and clams, and in many Italian households a favourite dish is *spaghetti al tonno*, spaghetti with tomato sauce and canned tuna. If served with fish or shellfish, spaghetti in proper Italian [etiquette](#) goes without cheese; otherwise it is often topped with grated Pecorino Romano or Parmesan cheese. Not easily found in Italy, except in the most tourist-oriented restaurants, is spaghetti with fist-sized meatballs, an American variation on the tiny southern Italian meatballs called *polpette*. Spaghetti covered with a meat-based [Bolognese sauce](#) is also now internationally common.

Spaghetti is one of the simpler pastas to make fresh, involving only all-purpose [flour](#), eggs, a little water, and, optionally, olive oil. Many commercial brands are available. Whether homemade or store-bought, however, spaghetti should be cooked [al dente](#), with a slight chewiness.

[Gregory Lewis McNamee](#)


spaghetti and Bolognese sauce Cooked spaghetti being put in the pan with hot Bolognese sauce.

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spaghetti Uncooked homemade spaghetti nests on a wooden table.

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Also known as: *pasta alimentaria*Written and fact-checked by [The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica](#)Last Updated: Feb 24, 2025 • [Article History](#)
[Table of Contents](#)


pasta Pasta with pesto and tomatoes.

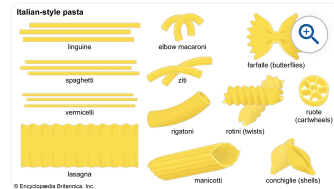
pasta, any of several starchy [food](#) preparations (*pasta alimentaria*) frequently associated with [Italian cuisine](#) and made from [semolina](#), the [granular](#) product obtained from the [endosperm](#) of a type of [wheat](#) called [durum](#), and containing a large proportion of [gluten](#) (elastic protein). It is formed into ribbons, cords, tubes, and various special shapes, all originally developed for specific characteristics, such as ability to retain heat or hold sauces.

In commercial processing, the semolina mixed with warm water is kneaded into a smooth stiff [dough](#) and extruded. The dough, moved forward while it is being compacted and mixed, is forced through perforated plates, or dies, that form it into the desired shape. Hollow tubular forms, such as [macaroni](#), result when the perforations are small and contain steel pins, while smaller holes without pins produce [spaghetti](#). Flat ribbonlike types are made by slitted perforations. Shell forms are produced by a special die; small fancy shapes are produced by rotary knives slicing the dough as it emerges from the die. The formed dough is next dried, reducing its moisture content from about 31 percent to approximately 12 percent. The drying is carefully regulated, as very rapid drying may result in cracking, and very slow drying may produce stretching or encourage the growth of mold or of organisms that produce souring.

Doughs may be coloured with [spinach](#) juice, producing green pasta; with [beet](#) juice, resulting in red types; and with [eggs](#), adding bright yellow colour. Eggs are frequently added to homemade pastas.

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Among the popular cord forms are spaghetti (“little string”), a finer type called spaghettini, and the very fine [vermicelli](#) (“little worms”). Tubular types include macaroni, shaped into tubes of $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch (12.7-mm) diameter, such variations as the small elbow-shaped pieces called *dita lisci*, and the large, fluted, elbow-shaped pieces called [rigatoni](#). Ribbon types include the wide [lasagna](#) and the narrow [linguini](#). Farfals are ground, granulated, or shredded. The wide variety of special shapes includes *farfalloni* (“large butterflies”), *lancette* (“little spears”), *fusilli* (“spindles”), and *riccioline* (“little curls”).

Pastas are prepared by [boiling](#) and may be cooked until firm and [resilient](#) to the bite (*al dente*) or until very tender. Prepared Italian style, they may be tossed with [butter](#), [cheese](#), and seasoning ([nutmeg](#), [pepper](#)) or served with a variety of sauces—[tomato](#), [cream](#), [seafood](#), or meat-based mixtures such as [Bolognese sauce](#). Shaped pastas are often stuffed with [meat](#), cheese, spinach, or a combination of these and other ingredients. Pastas are also cooked in [soups](#) and are used in casseroles and other dishes that call for the use of noodles, a similar starch preparation (see [noodle](#)). Uncooked pastas retain their freshness from three to six months.



spaghetti Spaghetti served with crayfish.



tortellini

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica

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