

Use your noodle, include pasta in meal plans

BY MELANIE POLK
SPECIAL WRITER

Whether you prefer a trendy pasta or an old-fashioned noodle, these carbohydrate-rich foods can play a delicious part in your health-conscious meal planning. March is National Noodle Month, a time to celebrate this economical and popular staple food. Although noodles have their origin in several basic Asian and Italian varieties, they are now used in virtually every international cuisine.

While the definition of a noodle varies, it is basically any flour paste that is boiled or cooked in liquid and has certain recognized shapes. Italian pasta, traditionally made from semolina wheat and water, comes in hundreds of different shapes — from cannellini to ziti. Oriental noodles are made from rice, wheat, beans (including soybeans), shrimp paste and even seaweed.

Noodles are a fundamentally low-fat food. It's up to you to enjoy them with sauces and other accompaniments that don't add too much fat to the dish. And, if you prepare pasta dishes with lots of vegetables, you can significantly boost the nutritional content of each serving.

Noodle soup is an exceptional

comfort food for a blustery March day. Simmer chicken broth with diced celery, onion and carrots, parsley, thyme, bay leaf and peppercorns. Once the vegetables are cooked, remove and reserve them while you cook the noodles in the broth. Then restore the vegetables, heat and serve.

Use noodles in a Szechuan stir-fry, made by tossing cooked Chinese egg or soy noodles in a bit of heated oil in a large pan or wok. In a bowl, combine soy sauce, vinegar, Tabasco sauce, minced garlic, sesame oil and chicken broth. Then add the noodles, fresh bean sprouts and chopped spinach, toss well, and serve immediately.

NOODLE EGGPLANT CASSEROLE

8 ounces medium egg noodles, uncooked
1 eggplant, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch slices
1/2 cup egg substitute
3/4 cup fine dry bread crumbs (1 1/2 ounces) can tomato sauce
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
1/8 teaspoon pepper
1/2 teaspoon oregano
1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese, divided

4 ounces lowfat mozzarella cheese, shredded, divided

Prepare noodles according to package directions. While noodles are cooking, dip each slice of eggplant into egg substitute, then into bread crumbs.

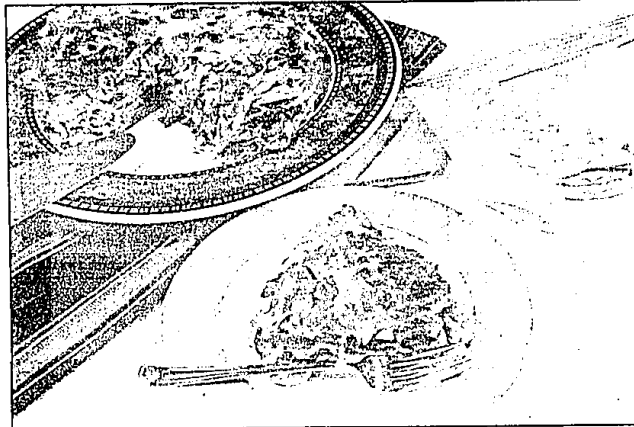
Coat each side well. Spray a cookie sheet with vegetable cooking spray. Place eggplant slices on cookie sheet and place under broiler for 3 to 4 minutes on each side, or until lightly browned.

Preheat oven to 375°F. In a medium bowl, combine tomato sauce, powder, pepper and oregano.

When the noodles are done, drain well. Spray a 2-quart baking dish with cooking spray. Place a layer of eggplant in bottom of baking dish. Layer half the noodles, followed by half of the tomato mixture. Sprinkle half the Parmesan cheese and half the mozzarella cheese on top.

Repeat with another layer of eggplant, the remaining noodles, and the remaining tomato sauce and cheese on top.

Cover with foil and bake for 30 minutes. Remove foil and continue baking 15 minutes, until cheese is melted and top is lightly browned.



Meatless dish: Noodle Eggplant Casserole combines noodles, slices of broiled eggplant with tomato sauce and cheese.

Shortcut tip: Bottled low-fat pasta sauce can be used in place of tomato sauce mixture.

Nutrition information: Each of the 6 servings contains 333 calories and 7 grams of fat.

Melanie Polk is a registered dietitian and Director of Nutrition Education for the American Institute for Cancer Research.

COOKING CALENDAR

Send items for consideration in Cooking Calendar to Keely Wygonik, Taste editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, Inc., 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or fax (734) 591-7279.

COOKING DEMONSTRATIONS

To celebrate National Nutrition Month, the Crittenon Hospital Weight Management Center is sponsoring cooking demonstrations through the month of March. Join Chef Randy Burt from Paint Creek Cider Mill

Restaurant as he conducts low-fat cooking demonstrations featuring a variety of light and healthy dishes, 6:30-9 p.m. Thursday, March 11 and March 18. Cooking demonstrations will take place at the restaurant, 4480 Orion Road, Rochester. The cost is \$10 per person and includes recipes and taste testing. Call (248) 652-5626 for reservations.

COOKING FOR ONE

Chef Kristen Fusco, owner of

Healing Through Whole Foods in Troy, gives pointers for eating solo, 7 p.m. Thursday, March 11 at the Botsford Center for Health Improvement, 39750 Grand River, Ave. Novi. There is a \$6 fee, call (248) 477-6100 for information/reservations.

HEALTH SEMINAR AND VEGETARIAN COOKING SCHOOL

Quick and easy non-meat recipes will be demonstrated 2-6 p.m. Sunday, March 14 at the Metropolitan Adventist School,

15585 Haggerty Road (north of Five Mile Road). The cost is \$15 for the first family member, and \$5 for each additional person from the same family. Call (313) 531-2479 or (248) 349-5683 to register. Many vegetarian recipes will be available and a vegetarian cookbook will be given to each participant who pays full price.

CHOCOLATE DEMO PROGRAM

Presented by world-renowned Pastry Chef Ewald Notter, Sat-

urday and Sunday, April 10-11 at the Lark Restaurant. The class and lunch will begin at 10:45 a.m. and will end after dessert is served between 3:30 and 4 p.m. The cost is \$100 per person. Reservations are a must. Call (248) 344-2197.

FOOD & NUTRITION CLASS

Eating out Healthfully, 2:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 18, at Garden City Hospital, 6245 Inkster Road, Garden City.

Cost \$8 per class or three for \$20, call (734) 458-4274 for registration information.

VEGETARIAN COOKING CLASSES

Offered by Lenore's Natural Cuisine, 22899 Inkster Road, Farmington Hills. Call (248) 478-4455 for registration information.

MACRO VAIL

Offering a variety of macrobiotic cooking classes, call (734) 261-2856 for information.

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