

## Basic fresh egg pasta dough

*Fresh pasta dough can be made with just flour and water, or with a mixture of eggs and water, with whole eggs and/or egg yolks. The more egg you use the easier the dough will be to handle and cook, and the more yolks you use the richer its golden colour will be. Use genuinely free range eggs, as it is the hens' diet of green things which makes their egg yolks orange. If you don't have special 'OO' (very fine) pasta flour 'di grano duro' (made from hard wheat, with high protein content), you can use regular plain flour and it will still work. I recommend the pasta flour available from Shipton Mill.*



**Makes: approx 600g (enough for 8 starters or 4 main courses)**

500g 'typo OO' pasta flour

4 large eggs

1 large egg yolk

salt

semolina flour

1. Mound the flour onto a clean work surface and create a large well inside so it looks like the crater of an exploded volcano. Crack eggs and the extra yolk into the well and add a generous pinch of salt.
2. Use a fork to whisk the eggs, then start bringing in the sides of the crater and incorporating flour. Keep mixing until you have a thick paste. At this point it may be easier to use your hands to knead in the remaining flour. Incorporate as much as possible – you want a stiff, smooth dough. If it seems too dry, sprinkle over a little water using your fingertips. Knead for 10 minutes – it *will* become smoother.
3. Cut the dough in two and wrap each piece tightly in clingfilm. Set aside for 30 minutes. If you like, you can make the dough several hours in advance, even the night before, in which case keep it in the fridge.
4. Assemble your pasta rolling machine and unwrap a piece of dough. Lightly dust a large area of work surface next to the machine with flour. Squidge the dough into a rectangular block, with one end tapered so that it can fit into the machine. Dust it with a little flour. With the machine set to its widest setting (usually 1), roll the dough through. Fold it in three like a business letter, prod it all over with your fingertips to seal, and repeat the process, feeding one of the open ends into the machine first. Keep repeating until the dough is smooth and silky. If it is sticking to the rollers you need to dust with more flour. If it is cracking up it may be getting too dry and you should use less or no flour.
5. Now feed the dough through each of the settings, getting thinner each time, until you get to the thinnest (usually 6). You only need go through each setting once, and this time don't fold the dough between rolls. You should end up with a long, thin sheet of fine pasta, the width of the machine.
6. Sprinkle plenty of semolina on a lined baking sheet. Cut the pasta into your desired shape and store on the baking sheet dusted with extra semolina so that the pieces don't stick. Cover with clingfilm and let rest for half an hour before cooking. Or keep it in the fridge and use within a day or two.
7. Bring a large pot of water to a boil and season generously with salt. Shake any excess semolina off the pasta and boil until *al dente* – usually just a few minutes. Unless your pot is huge you may need to do this in batches so as not to crowd the pasta. Drain pasta and let steam dry for a minute to remove excess moisture. Toss with your prepared pasta sauce or simply drizzle with extra virgin olive oil or melted butter and grind over some black pepper.

### **Pasta facts:**

There are over 800 different named pasta shapes. Some of these are just regional names for pretty much the same thing though. Some of their names translate as 'small bulls', 'little muffs', 'scruffy hats', 'pot bellied', 'little worms', 'bridegrooms' or 'little moustaches'.

That Marco Polo introduced pasta to Italy from China is a plain fabrication. Nobody knows who first made it. The Ancient Romans, Greeks and Etruscans were enjoying pasta long before Marco came along, and the Arabs probably invented the kind of dried pastas we are used to today. They are thought to have introduced it to Sicily in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

But pasta was not commonly found on Italian dining tables until the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its proliferation then seems to be due to a combination of factors – Neapolitan influence carried north by Garibaldi's returning army, new strains of wheat becoming available, and the industrial revolution which mechanised production. And it was in America that the idea of pasta as a main course developed. Italian immigrants generated the demand in the US which fuelled the mechanisation back home in Italy.

The word 'noodle', sometimes used to refer to pasta, comes from the Latin *nodellus* ('little knot'), describing the tangles of pasta on the plate.

Contrary to what some say, pasta cooked *al dente* is better for you than well-cooked pasta. If it's slightly tough you chew, which breaks the pasta down and mixes it with digestive enzymes in your saliva.

My favourite brand for dry pasta, fairly commonly available, is De Cecco. Look out for the blue bags and boxes. Their pasta is made using bronze die-cuts, which have irregular surfaces. The defects in the bronze make loads of minuscule cuts in the pasta, leaving the surface rough and able to absorb sauces better than that left smooth and shiny by nylon moulds. De Cecco also dries their pasta at low temperatures which leaves the pasta better able to retain its shape and strength during cooking.

### **Tips for cooking pasta:**

Buy good pasta, or make your own.

Use loads of water, the more the better. Each pasta piece needs to be able to stick out its arms and rotate in a circle without touching any others.

Don't put oil in the water. It's a myth that this prevents sticking. If anything it will make the pasta greasy and unable to absorb the sauce.

Put plenty of salt in the water. This does *not* reduce the cooking time by raising the boiling point, contrary to old wives you may have spoken to. (Well, it actually does raise the boiling point, and therefore also shorten the cooking time, but only by a fraction of a second.) The real reason to use salt is to enhance the flavour. If it boils in salted water the seasoning will penetrate right through and make it even yummier.

Make sure the water is properly boiling before adding the pasta, and add in batches if needed to ensure that it keeps boiling.

Drink your Chianti while watching the pot, not in the other room, because the only way to know when the pasta is done is by sight and feel. Ignore the instructions on the packet and just start testing bits of pasta when it starts to plump up. Catch it while still *al dente*.

Drain carefully so as not to break the pasta, especially if fresh, and let it steam-dry for a moment before mixing with sauce. Excess water needs to evaporate or the sauce will slide off rather than being absorbed.

Mix with the sauce at the last minute and serve piping hot, preferably straight from the cooking pot.

### **Sources:**

*On food and cooking*, Harold McGee, 2004

*What Einstein told his cook*, Robert Wolke, 2002

*Real flavours*, Glynn Christian, 2005

*Food lover's companion*, Sharon Tyler Herbst, 2001

[www.professionalpasta.it](http://www.professionalpasta.it)