

# THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

## SUN-DRIED TOMATO AND CHICKEN PENNE PASTA



Whole grains are associated with many health benefits such as a lower risk of diabetes, heart disease, obesity and high blood pressure. Yet many modern, fad, diets explicitly reduce the amount of grains they advise you to consume as for some reason, many diets make carbohydrates the enemy. These fad diets wrongly claim that to reach optimal nutrition, you must reduce the number of carbohydrates as much as possible. While excess intake of refined grains and added sugars, has been shown to be linked to obesity and inflammation, for the most part, these links are not extended to whole grains.

Whole grains, such as oatmeal, popcorn, brown rice, wild rice, and barley and numerous "ancient grains" can also be good sources of fiber which may help lower your risk of heart disease, various types of cancer and help you feel full longer. This means while enjoying your favorite pasta, it can be a healthy behavior by swapping out the refined grain noodles for whole grain ones. The Dietary Guidelines for Americans suggests that most should aim for at least half of the grains they consume be "whole grains". Use our Dietitian Approved Thumbs up tag at the shelf to help assist you.

Pasta dishes are easy and quick dishes and often times very economical that can result in a variety of flavor profiles. Also, these meals can be easy vehicles for including nutrient-dense foods like vegetables and contain items from every food group. This dish uses olive oil, sun dried tomatoes, and canned crushed tomatoes in place of marinara sauce which adds some healthy fat and a good amount of various vitamins, minerals and polyphenols to the dish. It also incorporates spinach, which increases the amount of iron in the dish, making it even more nutrient dense. This Sun-Dried Tomato and Chicken Penne Pasta might have 64 grams of carbohydrates per serving but those carbs come from nutrient dense whole grains, fruits and vegetables.

Pasta is not an enemy of your diet, in fact, it can be just the dish that helps you meet your goals in reaching for optimal nutrition. This week, take stock of what you might be missing from your diet be it more servings of vegetables or a particular nutrient like iron. Then use a pasta dish, while keeping portions in check, to help you meet that opportunity gap. You most likely already have everything you need sitting in your pantry.

### MACROS / SERVING SIZE:

Protein 47 g | Fat 22 g | Carbs 64 g

### % CALORIES OF MACROS / SERVING SIZE:

Calories 604 | Protein 29 % | Fat 31 % | Carbs 40 %

### NUTRIENT / SERVING SIZE:

Fiber 11 g | Sodium 641 mg | Sat. Fat 7 g

### INGREDIENTS (Serves 4)

- 12 oz. rotisserie chicken, skin and bones removed
- 4 oz. sun-dried tomatoes in olive oil, drained but keep the oil
- 2 tbsp. olive oil from the sun-dried tomatoes
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 small onion, minced
- ½ cup skim milk
- 1½ tsp. dried oregano
- Pinch of salt
- 1 12-14 oz. can crushed tomatoes
- 8 oz. fresh baby spinach leaves, chopped
- ¼ tsp. paprika (optional)
- 8 oz. whole wheat pasta
- 3 oz. grated Parmesan cheese
- Fresh basil leaves

### DIRECTIONS:

1. Cook pasta to al dente according to package instructions; drain and set aside.
2. While the pasta is cooking, sauté the garlic, onion, and drained sundried tomatoes in a large frying pan for 1 minute using the oil you drained from the sun-dried tomatoes. Sprinkle with a pinch of salt, oregano, and the optional paprika. Cook on medium heat while stirring for about 2 minutes or until the onions look clear.
3. Add the milk, canned tomatoes and cooked chicken to the pan and bring the sauce to a simmer.
4. Remove the sauce from heat. Add the pasta to the sauce and mix well. Add the chopped baby spinach and toss gently.
5. For each serving, place ¼ of the pasta on a plate and then top with a little freshly chopped basil and grated parmesan. Add a large piece of your favorite in-season melon or fruit to round out the meal.

### DIETITIAN TIP

For those that have young toddlers and choose to offer breads in the diet, consider having the primary offering be a whole wheat/grain option. Use our Dietitian Approved Thumbs up tag to guide you. Introduction of such choices early and used as the primary, sets one up for a nutrient dense default choices and preferences throughout life.



A list of recipes on [commissaries.com/healthy living](https://commissaries.com/healthy-living) also has nutrition education.