

Gluten-Free Pastas

By JULIANN SCHAEFFER

Gluten is like a four-letter word for people with celiac disease or nonceliac gluten sensitivity. Yet for many others, gluten is considered a magic ingredient. At least that's how Sylvia Tam, vice president of sales and marketing for gluten-free pasta manufacturer Maplegrove Foods, describes it.

That magic ingredient has been associated with wheat pasta for hundreds of years, creating what most people refer to as pasta's traditional (and much-loved) taste and texture. But it seems gluten-free product manufacturers are finding their own magic and creating different but still palatable pasta options that may lack the gluten but little else.

"Any gluten-free product presents a challenge to manufacturers, but the old saying, 'Necessity is the mother of invention' has led to giant leaps in the quality, taste, and texture [of gluten-free pasta products] over the years," Tam says, "so much so that non-celiacs are buying and enjoying gluten-free pastas. My favorite instance was when we launched our mac & cheese cups at the celiac show in Phoenix and a little boy, who was not the celiac member of the family, turned and remarked to his mother, 'Mommy, this doesn't taste gluten-free.'"

With new ingredient formulations, flavor combinations, and shapes offered on grocery shelves, the gluten-free pasta choices available today are plentiful, and many

say these options have a more desirable taste and texture than what existed a decade ago.

Today's Dietitian interviewed a handful of gluten-free pasta manufacturers to get a peek into how they're creating their gluten-free magic and then asked chefs and culinary RDs for their best cooking tips to help clients and patients make gluten-free pasta dishes and create their own magic at home.

More Choices, Better Options

"There has been significant growth in the number of pasta brands on the market, and we've had an active role in this, as we're primarily a contract manufacturer," says Tam, noting that Maplegrove Foods makes several gluten-free pastas, including Pastato and Pastariso. "A lot of familiar brands have originated in one of our two plants in California. Even without counting, I feel safe in stating that there are at least 10 times the number that existed 10 years ago."

"The gluten-free pasta category is growing significantly across all channels," says Constance Roark, MS, RDN, director of marketing for gluten-free pasta manufacturer Ancient Harvest, noting that not all gluten-free pastas are created equal in taste and texture. "We believe the category will continue to see steady innovation, and consumers will be faced with even a greater range of choices."

While it may go without saying, it's worth mentioning to clients and patients that one of the most important

*A Review of the
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factors in choosing the right gluten-free pasta, even ahead of preference for celiac patients, is looking for a third-party seal indicating that the product is certified as gluten-free—something all experts interviewed here affirmed.

"It's always wise to buy certified gluten-free products for safety's sake," says Carol Fenster, author of 11 gluten-free cookbooks, including *Gluten-Free 101: The Essential Beginner's Guide to Easy Gluten-Free Cooking*. "Look for the logo on the package. As for ingredients, it's really a matter of taste and personal preferences. I encourage people to try various brands to find one [they] like and then stick with it."

Aside from the particulars involved in ensuring all products are safe from any potential cross-contamination, which involves sourcing from only audited gluten-free suppliers, Tam credits Maplegrove Foods' flavor and texture improvements over the years with the quality and variety of ingredients they use in their pastas. "We use strictly non-GMO ingredients, which range from corn, rice, teff, amaranth, millet, quinoa, hemp, chia, flax, pre- and probiotics, vitamins and minerals, peas, and beans as is required by the formulation," she says.

According to Tam, Maplegrove Foods has been consistently improving its products since the company's inception in 1982, letting customer feedback guide its products' evolution, including the importance of convenience in today's society. "Today [vs. a few decades ago], our product holds up better. We now have microwavable versions [of some products] and soon will have one that rehydrates in hot water," she says, adding that Maplegrove Foods recently tested a new formulation for a chickpea pasta.

According to Roark, Ancient Harvest pays close attention to creating the taste and texture it believes customers are looking for, and it believes quality ingredients are the way to get there. Ancient Harvest has determined that using certified organic and non-GMO ingredients are key attributes to getting the flavor and texture profiles it seeks from its products. For example, its Supergrain Pastas line is made up of an organic quinoa and corn flour blend. "Quinoa's rich, nutty flavor combined with the organic corn flours in our proprietary blend give Ancient Harvest gluten-free pasta the familiar taste and al dente texture of traditional pastas," Roark says, noting that the quinoa and corn combination gives the noodles a rich, nutty flavor.

Vegetable Lasagna

Serves 8 to 12

Ingredients

- 1 T olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 8 oz button mushrooms, sliced
- 3 (8-oz) cans tomato sauce
- 1 (6-oz) can tomato paste
- ½ tsp dried basil
- ½ tsp dried rosemary
- ½ tsp dried thyme
- ½ tsp dried oregano
- 100 g superfine brown rice flour
- 90 g tapioca starch
- 43 g corn flour (not corn starch)
- 42 g potato starch
- 4 large eggs
- Cooking spray
- 10 oz frozen spinach, thawed and drained
- 16 oz cottage cheese
- 16 oz shredded mozzarella cheese

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 375°F.
2. Heat olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic to skillet and cook until onion begins to turn

translucent. Add mushrooms and cook until they soften. Stir in tomato sauce, tomato paste, and herbs, and cook until combined and heated through. Remove from heat.

3. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Meanwhile, combine brown rice flour, tapioca starch, corn flour, and potato starch in a medium bowl. Make a well and add eggs. Stir well until mixture forms a ball. Remove to a lightly tapioca-starched surface and knead well. Roll between two tapioca-starched pieces of parchment paper, stopping frequently to rub starch over pasta dough, until dough is ⅛-inch thick. Cut dough with a fluted-cutter (or plain old knife) into 9- X 3-inch strips. Gather leftover scraps, and reroll and cut to make a total of 9 strips. Cook 3 strips at a time for 2 minutes in the boiling water, keeping remaining uncooked strips covered with a wet paper towel.

4. Spoon a thin layer of tomato mixture onto the bottom of a 13- X 9-inch baking dish coated with cooking spray. Lay three cooked pasta strips on the tomato mixture. Sprinkle evenly with ⅓ of the spinach and ⅓ of the cottage cheese. Spread ⅓ of the tomato mixture on top. Sprinkle ⅓ of the shredded mozzarella on top of tomato



sauce. Repeat layer once. Top with remaining three pasta strips, remaining ⅓ tomato mixture, and remaining ⅓ shredded mozzarella. Cover with foil.

5. Bake for 45 minutes. Remove foil and bake an additional 18 minutes, or until cheese is melted and begins to brown.

Nutrient Analysis per serving

Calories: 343; Total fat: 6 g; Sat fat: 2 g; Trans fat: 0 g; Sodium: 1,280 mg; Cholesterol: 0 g; Total carbohydrate: 49 g; Dietary fiber: 4 g; Sugar: 10 g; Protein: 22 g

— RECIPE AND PHOTO COURTESY OF GRETCHEN BROWN, RD

"Our Garden Pagodas are also a nice option to serve plain because of the added spinach, beet, and red bell pepper" that add a nice flavor profile, she adds.

Heidi Gordon, marketing manager for Italian pasta maker Jovial Foods, says it's difficult to make gluten-free pasta taste like traditional wheat pasta. Jovial uses Old World artisan techniques, such as extruding the pasta dough through bronze dies to create the shapes and a slower low-temperature drying technique. "This creates a delicious al dente pasta even non-gluten-free eaters can enjoy," Gordon says. Jovial, which uses an organic brown rice blend for many of its pastas, also recently introduced the first organic gluten-free egg noodle.

Craig Schauffel is the chef at Three Bridges, a San Francisco-based company that offers a refrigerated line of chef-crafted pastas, sauces, and meals, including a gluten-free filled pasta option in five cheese ravioli and butternut squash ravioli. According to Schauffel, the process of making cut and dried pastas allows for more flexibility when attempting to avoid the typical gumminess associated with gluten-free pastas because numerous other grains can be added to the dough mix. This isn't so easy when making gluten-free raviolis. As such, when attempting to formulate Three Bridges' fresh ravioli, Schauffel says he encountered additional obstacles that were unique to this pasta type.

"In fresh pasta like Three Bridges' gluten-free ravioli, there are much bigger challenges to overcome when trying to get two sheets of dough to laminate together and create a seal when the gluten protein structure is absent," he says. "Only corn and rice flour have enough starch to help with this type of process and are usually 75% or more of the dough formulation. You can add in some of the ancient grains, but if you add more than 10%, then the dough will not function—the seal will open up and the filling will leak out—for a fresh-filled ravioli.

"For filled pasta, you need to try and create that gluten weblike structure with functional gums and starches, using egg to create that al dente bite," he continues, noting that it took him and his team at Three Bridges more than a year and a half to find the perfect blend of the right ingredients in the right amounts to mimic a ravioli similar to a wheat pasta.

Of course, for clients and patients interested in adding some adventure to their afternoon (an evening likely won't suffice), they're welcome to try their hand at making their gluten-free pasta at home—if they dare. "Absolutely, gluten-free pasta can be made at home, just as any wheat-based pasta is made,"

says Gretchen F. Brown, RD, founder of the gluten-free blog *Kumquat* and author of *Fast & Simple Gluten-Free*. "The only change is that the dough may require a binder, such as an extra egg yolk or a tiny bit of xanthan gum, if it becomes too tender."

Over the years, Fenster has made her share of gluten-free pasta from scratch. She says the trick is finding the right blend of flavors. "My recipe includes flours from sorghum, potato, corn, and tapioca and also xanthan gum and eggs to bind it all together," she says.

However, Fenster says because of the increased quality of today's store-bought gluten-free pasta offerings, she's often forgone homemade pasta. "I haven't included a recipe for homemade pasta in any of my books since 2010 because I think that manufacturers are doing such a good job—especially with penne, tubular, and spiral pasta—that the home cook can't possibly make a product that is as good, especially the tubular or spiral types," she says. "That said, we can still make excellent gnocchi and flat pasta such as lasagna noodles."

For those with the time and inclination, suggest clients and patients try their hand at Brown's gluten-free lasagna on page 38, which is made with homemade corn lasagna noodles.

Gluten-Free Cooking Tips

According to Fenster, one of the biggest complaints of gluten-free pasta as a whole is its tendency to fall apart if overcooked. "It also tends to clump together if not served immediately after cooking," she says. But according to the chefs and RDs interviewed here, there are ways to get the most out of any gluten-free pasta to ensure the end product turns out as intended, both in flavor and texture.

First, Fenster says directions on the back of the box are indispensable. While clients and patients may be accustomed to how long any given wheat pasta may take to reach al dente on their stove, every gluten-free pasta will be different, as different ingredients will require different cooking times. "Use plenty of water—4 cups for each 8 oz of pasta," Fenster says, "and salt the water liberally after it starts to boil. Most pasta is mild, and salt brings out its flavor."

Karen Morgan, founder of Blackbird Bakery in Austin, Texas, and author of *The Everyday Art of Gluten-Free*, also sees the importance of salt, not just for flavor but also to keep the pasta from sticking together. "I always use heavily salted water to both flavor the pasta as it cooks and to change the weight of the water," she says. "When people swim in the Dead Sea, they



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float because there's so much salt in the water. When you're boiling pastas, the same principle applies: The pasta will float apart more readily, reducing the risk of sticking together in an unsightly lump.

"You also need to stir the pasta after you have added it to the water so this will not happen, but my general rule of thumb is to toss in 1.5 T of kosher salt per pound of pasta," she adds.

Fenster recommends cooking the pasta just until it feels slightly soft when you bite into it—sometimes called *al dente* or "to the tooth"—but not soft. "Remove it from the heat and drain. It will continue to cook from residual heat even after it's out of the boiling water," she says.

Rocco DiSpirito, chef and author of *The Pound a Day Diet*, suggests modifying the cooking preparation time depending on the ingredients from which a pasta is made. "Quinoa is one of my favorite gluten-free pastas, but if you cook it like a wheat pasta, you will have a broken mess," he says. "It needs to be blanched and then steeped in the sauce it's ultimately destined for."

Conversely, DiSpirito says corn pasta should be rinsed after boiling but recommends saving some of the cooking water, which he says is integral to giving sauces a silky texture and shine.

Unlike regular pasta, which can be more forgiving, Fenster says gluten-free pastas should be eaten immediately. "It will get mushy and break apart if it sits

in the pot or on a buffet table for an extended period of time," she says. "Be gentle when you stir in the sauce so you don't tear the pasta."

Though gluten-free pastas will clump together when chilled, Fenster says a brief rinsing in hot water will separate the pasta pieces.

Because one of the "sticking points" of gluten-free pasta is its tendency to get mushy when overcooked, not all gluten-free varieties will survive in a casserole or soup. To solve this problem, DiSpirito suggests trying corn elbow pasta for any baked dish. "Just try to cook the dish beforehand and just use the oven's broiler to brown the top instead of cooking the whole dish through," he says.

Moreover, DiSpirito says that because gluten-free pastas can be made with different ingredients, not only will they cook differently, but some will pair better with certain flavor combinations. "Try quinoa pasta with shellfish or a corn-based pasta with creamy sauces," he says, noting that farro pastas work well with mushroom sauces.

One need only take his advice to see how right he is. "Try a chestnut pasta with a simple Bolognese and tell me I'm wrong," he says.

— Juliann Schaeffer is a freelance writer and editor based in Alburtis, Pennsylvania, and a frequent contributor to *Today's Dietitian*.

Pesto Caprese Quinoa Penne Pasta Salad

Serves 4 to 6

Ingredients

- 1 (8-oz) package Ancient Harvest Penne Quinoa Pasta, cooking water reserved
- $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chilled pesto sauce (homemade or store-bought)
- 1 pint cherry or grape tomatoes
- Fresh mini mozzarella balls
- Salt and pepper
- Fresh basil, to top

Directions

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil.
2. Add pasta, stirring occasionally, for 6 to 9 minutes until just tender. Avoid overcooking.
3. Drain the pasta and reserve $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the cooking water in bowl.
4. Run pasta under cold water to halt the cooking process and chill.

5. Place the pasta back in the pot and stir in the desired amount of pesto, adding 1 T at a time of cooking water to help spread. You will most likely only need 2 to 4 T of water.

6. Slice desired amount of tomatoes and mozzarella in halves or quarters and mix into the pasta.

7. Taste and add salt and pepper if needed. Top with basil. This pasta salad is best when chilled for about 1 to 2 hours in the fridge but fine to serve immediately. Store leftovers in a sealed container in the fridge for three to four days. Add a good drizzle of olive oil to remoisten before eating.

Nutrient Analysis per serving

Calories: 232; Total fat: 14 g; Sat fat: 4 g; Trans fat: 0 g; Sodium: 314 mg; Cholesterol: 0 g; Total carbohydrate: 19 g; Dietary fiber: 2 g; Sugar: 4 g; Protein: 6 g

— RECIPE AND PHOTO COURTESY OF ANCIENT HARVEST





Brown Rice Tagliatelle With Creamy Mushrooms and Chickpeas

Serves 4

Ingredients

- 9 oz Jovial egg tagliatelle
- 8 oz mushrooms, sliced
- 3 scallions, sliced
- 3 T Jovial extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup chickpeas
- 1 clove garlic
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water
- 2 T fresh parsley, minced

Directions

1. Sauté mushrooms, scallions, 2 T of olive oil with salt to taste in a large skillet until tender.
2. In a blender, purée $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of chickpeas, garlic, 1 T of olive oil, and $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of water until creamy.

3. Add chickpea cream and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of whole chickpeas to the skillet, turn heat to medium low, and cook until thickened, about 5 minutes.
4. Cook pasta according to package instructions.
5. Toss pasta with creamy mushrooms and chickpea sauce and serve garnished with freshly minced parsley.

Nutrient Analysis per serving

Calories: 395; Total fat: 13 g; Sat fat: 2 g; Trans fat: 0 g; Sodium: 184 mg; Cholesterol: 0 g; Total carbohydrate: 59 g; Dietary fiber: 5 g; Sugar: 3 g; Protein: 13 g

— RECIPE AND PHOTO COURTESY OF JOVIAL FOODS



Gluten-Free Mac and Cheese Bites

Makes 36 appetizers

Ingredients

- Gluten-free nonstick cooking spray
- $\frac{1}{2}$ lb Pastariso Gluten Free White Rice Pasta Elbows (2 cups uncooked)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup plus 2 T milk
- 2 tsp corn or tapioca starch
- 2 T butter
- $\frac{1}{2}$ white onion, very finely diced
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp kosher or fine sea salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp black pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp nutmeg, freshly grated
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 2 T Parmesan cheese, grated
- 1 cup yellow or white cheddar cheese, grated
- 2 T gluten-free panko style bread crumbs

Directions

1. Preheat oven to 425°F. Spray 36 mini muffin tins with gluten-free nonstick cooking spray.
2. Cook the pasta in heavily salted boiling water per the package directions. Drain and rinse with hot water.
3. In a small bowl, stir together 2 T of milk with the corn or tapioca starch.
4. In a large skillet, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the onion, salt, pepper, and nutmeg and cook until the onion is very soft but not browned, about 5 minutes. Add

the remaining $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of milk and bring to a boil. Stir in the cornstarch mixture and boil until thickened, just a few seconds. Stir in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of Parmesan cheese and the cheddar cheese. Lower heat and stir until the cheeses are melted. Add the cooked pasta and stir to coat the pasta with the cheese sauce. Taste and add some more salt and pepper if needed.

5. Combine the remaining 2 T of Parmesan cheese with the bread crumbs.
6. Spoon rounded tablespoons of the mac and cheese mixture into the prepared muffin tins, gently pressing down with the back of a

spoon. Sprinkle a pinch of the bread crumb mixture on top of each mac and cheese bite and bake for 11 to 12 minutes or until the bites are golden brown and sizzling. Let cool for 5 minutes, then run a knife around each bite and remove from the pans.

7. Serve warm.

Nutrient Analysis per serving (1 bite)

Calories: 53; Total fat: 2 g; Sat fat: 1 g; Trans fat: 0 g; Sodium: 44 mg; Cholesterol: 0 g; Total carbohydrate: 5 g; Dietary fiber: 0 g; Sugar: 0 g; Protein: 2 g

— RECIPE AND PHOTO BY CAROL KICINSKI FOR MAPLEGROVE FOODS

