



# Pasta & Pizza Dinners

## 7 Nourishing Recipes from My Table to Yours

*By Liz Weiss, MS, RDN*  
Liz's Healthy Table





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Color, Cook, Eat! Smoothie Bowls

Color, Cook, Eat! Wholesome Family Dinners

No Whine with Dinner: 150 Healthy, Kid-Tested Recipes from The Meal Makeover  
Moms (M3 Press, 2011)

The Moms' Guide to Meal Makeovers: Improving the Way Your Family Eats, One Meal at a  
Time! (Broadway Books, 2004)

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# INTRODUCTION

Is dinner a challenge in your household? Are you hungry for more variety, color, and good nutrition for your family? And do you love pasta and pizza but worry you're giving your kids nothing but carbs, carbs, and more carbs when dinner time rolls around?

To the rescue are seven new and nutritious pasta and pizza recipes, created exclusively for you and your hungry family!

My boys love pasta and pizza, and so do I. From ravioli and tortellini to playful rotini and spaghetti, pasta is versatile, offering endless mealtime possibilities. It cooks up quickly and yes, it's nutritious. A half-cup serving has fewer than 100 calories and a minimal amount of fat, and it's a good source of B vitamins, folic acid, and iron. The keys to keeping pasta healthy are to keep the portion size in check, pay attention to what you put on it (watch the cream sauce!), and choose whole wheat or whole wheat blend pasta versus white. The same is true for pizza. A pizza made with a whole grain crust and toppers like marinara sauce, low-fat cheese, and a lot of vegetables can easily be turned from a ho-hum dinner into a meal that's both hearty and wholesome.

The seven no-fuss pasta and pizza recipes that I've cooked up here have been tested (and devoured) by my own family. They're comforting and satisfying and filled with flavor and good nutrition. From Macaroni Minestrone Soup and Sweet Apple and Squash Lasagna to Green Eggs and Bacon Pizza, your dinnertime dream of happily sharing one delicious and nutritious meal with the whole family will finally come true.

From my table to yours,

*Liz*



# Macaroni Minestrone Soup

If your kids like alphabet soup and other vegetable/pasta soup combinations, they'll surely slurp up this veggie-packed minestrone soup with gusto. The secret to mealtime success with this dish is to dice the zucchini and carrots into small, cute pieces so they go down with a smile along with the more familiar elbow pasta. And note I use whole wheat elbow pasta in this recipe, which is just as kid-pleasing as plain pasta, but higher in fiber.

**Tip:** Any kind of bean would work wonders in this soup—chickpeas or pinto beans come to mind—and if you prefer a teeny-tiny pasta shape instead of elbows, try whole wheat orzo.

**Makes 6 Servings**



- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 small zucchini (about 1 pound), unpeeled and cut into 1/4-inch dice (3 cups)
- 1 large carrot, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch dice (about 1 cup)
- 1 small onion, cut into 1/4-inch dice (about 1 cup)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
- 1 32-ounce carton all-natural vegetable broth
- 1 15-ounce can tomato sauce
- 1 15-ounce can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 1/2 cup dried whole wheat elbow macaroni (or any other small shaped pasta)
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese, optional
- Fresh basil, cut into strips, optional

**1** Heat the oil in a large Dutch oven or saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the zucchini, carrot, onion, garlic, and thyme and cook, stirring frequently until the vegetables soften, about 12 minutes. Reduce the heat if the vegetables brown too quickly.

**2** Stir in the broth and tomato sauce, cover, raise the heat, and bring to a boil. Add the beans and pasta, reduce the heat, and cook at a low boil, uncovered, until the pasta is done, about 10 minutes. Stir a few times as you go; some of the pasta may stick to the bottom of the pot.

**3** Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve in individual bowls and top with the Parmesan cheese and basil as desired.

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*Nutrition Information per Serving (1 cup): 210 calories, 8g fat (1g saturated), 390mg sodium, 34g carbohydrate, 7g fiber, 8g protein, 60% vitamin A, 35% vitamin C, 20% iron,*



# Mama's One-Pot Penne and Beef Dinner

When I was a little girl growing up in the suburbs of New York, my mom often made a to-die-for baked ziti dish for dinner. It was made with ground beef, a few cans of Campbell's Tomato Soup, and lots (and I mean lots!) of cheese. Now, as a mom myself, I make a version of this recipe with a few healthy and streamlined updates. I use whole wheat penne instead of white pasta, toss in fresh basil for a pop of flavor, and shredded carrots for good nutrition (they literally melt into the mix), and I slim things down with lean ground beef and part-skim mozzarella cheese. This one-pot dinner is a big gooey mess ... but in a good way!

## Makes 6 Servings

- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1 small onion, cut into ¼-inch dice (about 1 cup)
- 1 pound lean ground beef (90% lean or higher)
- 2 medium carrots, shredded (1 generous cup)
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 32-ounce carton tomato soup
- 1 cup water
- 8 ounces dried whole wheat penne pasta (about 2½ cups)
- ½ cup fresh basil leaves, roughly chopped (or more to taste)
- 1 cup shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese



**1** Heat the oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring frequently, until tender and golden, 5 minutes. Add the beef, carrots, and garlic powder and cook, breaking up the large pieces of meat, until no longer pink, about 5 minutes. Drain excess fat.

**2** Add the tomato soup and water and stir until well combined. Bring the liquid to a boil and stir in the pasta. Reduce the heat and cook, covered, at a low boil, until the penne is tender, about 25 minutes. Stir occasionally. (Some of the pasta may stick to the bottom of the pot, so give it a good scrape from time to time!)

**3** Stir in the basil and mozzarella cheese and serve in individual bowls. Sprinkle with Parmesan cheese.

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*Nutrition Information per Serving (1 cup): 380 calories, 22g fat (7g saturated), 588mg sodium, 38g carbohydrate, 5g fiber, 26g protein, 80% vitamin A, 15% calcium, 12% iron*

# Sweet Apple and Squash Lasagna

Most lasagna recipes are made with things like ground beef, spinach, and mushrooms. This lasagna is way different, because the noodles are layered with a few unexpected ingredients: thinly sliced apple and pureed winter squash. The combo may sound weird, but trust me when I say this vegetarian lasagna is ridiculously delicious. It's slightly sweet and savory all at the same time. A taste bud pleaser for sure.

**Tip:** When butternut squash is in season, you can roast it until tender, mash, and then use instead of the frozen pureed squash.

**Makes 8 Servings**



- 1/4 cup prepared basil pesto
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 4 cups 1% low-fat milk
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- Pinch ground nutmeg
- 12 no-boil lasagna noodles (one 8-ounce box)
- 1 10- or 12-ounce box frozen cooked pureed winter squash, thawed (season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg to taste)
- 1 medium apple, quartered, cored, peeled, and very thinly sliced (28–30 slices)
- 2 cups shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese (8 ounces)
- 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese

**1** Preheat the oven to 375°F. Place the pesto in a large saucepan over low heat. Add the flour and whisk, about 2 minutes. (The pesto/flour mixture will be a bit lumpy and clumpy at first.) Whisk the milk, salt, pepper, and nutmeg slowly into the flour mixture. Keep whisking until the pesto/flour mixture is well combined. Raise the heat and bring to a low boil, stirring constantly. Reduce the heat, simmer, and stir until the mixture thickens slightly, about 3 minutes.

**2** Lightly oil or coat a 9 x 13-inch baking dish or pan with nonstick cooking spray. Spread 3/4 cup of the sauce over the prepared dish. Arrange 3 lasagna noodles evenly on top of the sauce. Spread a third of the winter squash and a third of the sliced apples over the noodles. Top with 1/2 cup mozzarella cheese and 3/4 cup sauce.

**3** Repeat layering two more times. Top with the remaining 3 noodles and the remaining 1 cup sauce. Cover tightly with aluminum foil and bake for 40 minutes. Remove the foil, sprinkle the remaining 1/2 cup mozzarella cheese and the Parmesan cheese evenly over the lasagna. Return to the oven and continue to bake, uncovered, until the sauce bubbles and the top is golden, 15 more minutes. Cool about 10 minutes before slicing and serving.

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*Nutrition Information per Serving: 300 calories, 17g fat (6g saturated), 565mg sodium, 37g carbohydrate, 4g fiber, 9g protein, 20% calcium*



# Tuscan Rotini and Tuna Bowls

Bowl meals are a popular trend. They're gorgeous to look at and depending on what you put in them, spectacularly nutritious. For this colorful bowl of goodness, I use convenient, protein-rich canned tuna and then build from there with whole wheat rotini pasta, baby kale, edamame, and grape tomatoes. The final touch is thinly sliced avocado (technically a fruit!), which adds a luscious texture to the meal. Avocados happen to be my favorite food in the world, but if it's not yours, just leave it out.

**Makes 4 Servings**



- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh dill
- ½ teaspoon Dijon mustard
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups dried whole wheat rotini pasta
- 2 packed cups baby kale or spinach cut into 'ribbons'
- 2 5-ounce cans solid white albacore tuna in water, drained and flaked
- 1 cup frozen shelled edamame, cooked
- 1 cup grape tomatoes, quartered
- 1 ripe, fresh avocado, seeded, peeled, and cut into thin slices

**1** In a medium-size bowl, whisk together the olive oil, lemon juice, garlic, dill, mustard, and salt and pepper to taste until well combined. Set the dressing aside.

**2** Cook the pasta according to package directions. When done, drain, return to the pot, add the kale 'ribbons' and toss with 2 tablespoons of the dressing.

**3** To assemble, divide the pasta mixture, tuna, edamame, tomatoes, and avocado evenly between four bowls. Drizzle with the remaining dressing and garnish with additional fresh dill, as desired.

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*Nutrition Information per Serving (1 bowl): 420 calories, 23g fat (3g saturated), 360mg sodium, 41g carbohydrate, 8g fiber, 29g protein, 15% vitamin A, 25% vitamin C, 15% calcium, 20% iron*

# Green Eggs and Bacon Pizza

Does your family crave breakfast for dinner? Mine does, so I've served plenty of pancakes and savory cheese omelets over the years (and have always been thanked with big smiles). In keeping with the breakfast-for-dinner theme, I decided to create this breakfast pizza, topped with a few slices of all-natural bacon, scrambled eggs, cheese, and sautéed baby spinach leaves. The spinach is a subtle touch and an easy way to elevate the vitamin A, and the eggs provide protein and choline, a type of B vitamin that's important for brain health.

***Makes 5 to 6 Servings***



- 1 12-inch pre-made pizza crust
- 2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 3 packed cups baby spinach, roughly chopped
- 5 large eggs, beaten
- 4 slices nitrite-free bacon, cooked, patted well between paper towels to remove excess fat, and coarsely chopped
- 1 cup shredded reduced-fat Italian blend or reduced-fat Cheddar cheese

**1** Preheat the oven to 425°F (or the temperature indicated on your pizza crust). Bake the pizza crust according to package directions.

**2** While the crust is cooking, heat 1 teaspoon of the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook, stirring frequently, until golden, 30 seconds to 1 minute.

**3** Raise the heat to medium-high. Add the spinach and cook, stirring frequently, until wilted, about 3 minutes. Remove to a small bowl and set aside. Add the remaining teaspoon of oil to the skillet. Add the eggs and scramble until set, about 3 minutes.

**4** Remove the cooked crust from the oven. Top evenly with a layer of the spinach, the bacon, and the eggs. Spread the shredded cheese evenly on top. Place back in the oven and cook until the cheese melts, another 2 minutes. Slice and serve.

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*Nutrition Information per Serving (1 slice): 320 calories, 12g fat (4g saturated), 745 mg sodium, 34g carbohydrate, 2g fiber, 18g protein, 35% vitamin A, 10% vitamin C, 17% calcium, 20% iron*

# BBQ Chicken Pizza Pies

I have never met a child who didn't love pizza. In fact, kids between the ages of three and 11 prefer pizza over all other foods for lunch or dinner. Pizza is a quintessential family favorite, and when it's made with a saucy mixture of sautéed chicken and sweet bell peppers and then topped with low-fat cheese, it's guaranteed to keep your troops happy and healthy. I use whole wheat English muffins in these pies to boost the good nutrition even more.

**Tip:** If you can't find whole wheat English muffins at the market, look for the multigrain option instead.

**Makes 6 Servings**



- 1 12-ounce package whole wheat English muffins (6 muffins)
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil or organic canola oil
- 1 medium orange bell pepper, cut into ¼-inch dice (about 1½ cups)
- 4 green onions, thinly sliced (reserve 2 inches of the green tops, slice, and use for garnish)
- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast halves, cut into ½-inch dice (2½ cups)
- ½ cup all-natural barbecue sauce
- 1½ cups shredded, part-skim mozzarella cheese (about 6 ounces)

**1** Preheat the oven to 400°F. Slice the English muffins in half and place on a foil-lined baking sheet. Toast in the oven for about 5 minutes. Remove and set aside.

**2** Heat the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add the bell pepper and cook, stirring frequently, until softened, about 5 minutes. Adjust heat as you go if the peppers brown too quickly.

**3** Add the green onions and chicken and cook, stirring frequently, until no longer pink, 3 to 4 minutes. Stir in the barbecue sauce until combined.

**4** To assemble the pizzas, top each muffin half evenly with the chicken mixture, and sprinkle evenly with the cheese. Bake until the cheese melts, about 5 minutes.

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*Nutrition Information per Serving (2 halves): 375 calories, 11g fat (5g saturated), 520mg sodium, 30g carbohydrate, 4g fiber, 37g protein, 25% vitamin A, 50% vitamin C, 30% calcium, 14% iron*



# Mushroom and Caramelized Onion Naan Pizzas

The thing I love most about this recipe is its flexibility. Once you've sautéed your vegetables and laid out all your ingredients, everyone at the table can customize their own pizza. The other thing that I love about these build-your-own pies is the sweetness of the caramelized onion and how it pairs up perfectly with the slightly salty hints from the olives and cheese.

**Tip:** If you can't find the mini naan whole grain flatbreads at your market, use small, sandwich-size whole grain pita breads instead.

**Makes 8 Mini Pizzas**



- 5 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 large onion, peeled, halved, and cut into very thin half-moons
- 1 8-ounce container sliced mushrooms
- 1 medium red bell pepper, cut in half lengthwise, seeded, and cut into very thin slices
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh oregano
- 8 mini naan whole grain flatbreads
- ½ cup marinara sauce
- 1 cup crumbled feta cheese or shredded part-skim mozzarella cheese
- 1 2.25-ounce can sliced black olives

**1** Heat 2 teaspoons of the oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring frequently, until golden and caramelized, about 15 minutes. Lower the heat if the onions start to turn brown. Remove the onions to a bowl and set aside.

**2** Preheat the oven to 400°F. Cover two rimmed baking sheets with aluminum foil and set aside.

**3** Add the remaining 3 teaspoons of oil to the skillet. Raise the heat to medium high and add the mushrooms, bell pepper, and oregano. Cook, stirring frequently, until tender, about 10 minutes. Lower the heat if the mushrooms begin to burn.

**4** To make the pizzas, place the naan bread on the baking sheets. Spread 1 tablespoon marinara sauce evenly over each naan bread. Top each mini pizza with 1 tablespoon cheese and then top evenly with the caramelized onion, sautéed mushrooms and bell pepper, and the olives. (You may not use up all of the olives, so serve them on the side for an extra nibble.) Top each with 1 more tablespoon of cheese.

**5** Bake until the cheese melts slightly and the naan is crispy, 8 to 10 minutes.

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*Nutrition Information per Serving (1 slice): 290 calories, 13g fat (5g saturated), 685mg sodium, 35g carbohydrate, 5g fiber, 9g protein, 15% vitamin A, 35% vitamin C, 15% calcium, 14% iron*



