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CULINARY  
INSTITUTE OF  
CHILD NUTRITION

# CULINARY QUICK BITES

BASIC COOKING TECHNIQUES:  
HOW TO COOK PASTA



# **CULINARY QUICK BITES**

## **BASIC COOKING TECHNIQUES: HOW TO COOK PASTA**

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Key Area: 2 – Operations

**USDA Professional Standards Code**  
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# TRAINING OVERVIEW

The Culinary Quick Bites training series is a tool to help child nutrition professionals develop and refine their culinary skills. Each lesson is designed to last approximately fifteen minutes. Each lesson should be facilitated (led) by the person responsible for overseeing food production at a meal site, service area, or at the district level.

Training facilitators should review the training, in its entirety, prior to conducting the training.

This training has been developed to address a variety of learning styles. The training includes an overview of the topic presented by the facilitator, an infographic to reinforce the training topic visually, a video to demonstrate the topic, and an activity to reinforce learning.

Please contact the Institute of Child Nutrition Help Desk at 1-800-321-3054 or [helpdesk@theicn.org](mailto:helpdesk@theicn.org) if you have any questions about how best to facilitate this training.

## KEY AREA

Key Area: 2 – Operations

## PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

### FOOD PRODUCTION – 2100

Employee will be able to effectively utilize food preparation principles, production records, kitchen equipment, and food crediting to prepare foods from standardized recipes, including those for special diets.

2130 – Develop culinary skills necessary for school meal preparation.

## FACILITATOR'S NOTES

This training counts for 15 minutes of training credit under USDA Professional Standards learning objective 2130 – Develop culinary skills necessary for school meal preparation.

This activity helps reinforce knowledge and skills learned during this lesson. The cooked pasta prepared during this lesson may be included in the next day's menu production.

Before the training, prepare for the lesson activity and set up the kitchen workstation as described on page 13.

Deliver the lesson/training to participants:

- Read the lesson overview to the participants.
- Discuss the infographic and how it relates to the training topic.
- View the instruction video with participants.
- Answer any questions participants may have on the lesson, infographic, and video.

Complete the activity as instructed on page 13.

## MATERIALS NEEDED



- Whole grain pasta (amount based on your service needs)
- Water (amount based on your service needs)
- 2- or 4-inch hotel/steam table pan (size based on your service needs)
- Lid (or foil)
- Strainer
- Infographic: How to Cook Pasta – 1 per person
- Equipment: steamer, oven, tilt skillet, or stove top
- Access to a screen to show the training video. Possible options include:
  - Site computer monitor with sound
  - Projector with sound
  - Tablets and smartphones
    - A QR code has been provided for quick access to the video on handheld devices.



# LESSON OVERVIEW

## OBJECTIVE:

At the end of this lesson, participants will be able to demonstrate how to cook pasta.

## GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT COOKING PASTA

- When cooking pasta, it is important to remember that it is best cooked until al dente (to the tooth which means soft to touch and firm to the bite) and then held for service, as this grain has carry-over cook time. If pasta is overcooked, it has a soft and mushy texture that is undesirable to students.
  - Carry-over cooking is a phenomenon that occurs when you remove cooked food from the heat source, but the food continues to cook even though it's no longer being heated. This happens because the residual heat trapped in the food continues to cook it, causing an increase in internal temperature even after you take it off the heat source.
- To separate pasta that sticks together, rinse with cool water and break apart gently with gloved hands.
- For a cold pasta salad, make sure that pasta is completely cooled (under refrigeration) before adding the dressing. This will prevent pasta from absorbing too much dressing, which would result in an overpowering flavor and soggy texture.
- Pre-cooked pasta will reheat quickly for easy batch cooking throughout the week or can be cooled and frozen for later use. The steamer is a great way to reheat pre-cooked pasta; times will vary depending on amount.



# LESSON OVERVIEW

## HOW TO COOK PASTA USING DIFFERENT KITCHEN EQUIPMENT

- **Steamer:** Place dry pasta in a 2-inch perforated steam table pan with a non-perforated 2-inch steam table pan underneath. Add water to cover the pasta, and cover the pan with a lid. Place the pan of pasta in the steamer. Cooking time will vary depending on the type of steamer. Remove the pan from the steamer and check doneness. Carefully drain the pasta and pan for service or cool and store to use later.
- **Oven:** Preheat water (enough to cover the pasta by at least one inch) in the oven, add pasta, then cover and cook (cooking time will vary by amounts being prepared). Drain using a strainer.
- **Kettle:** Fill kettle with water and bring water to a boil; add pasta and cook for 4–5 minutes. Begin the draining process before pasta is done, as pasta will continue to cook through the draining process until the carry-over cooking has stopped.
- **Tilt skillet:** Fill the tilt skillet with water and bring it to a boil. Place pasta in 4-inch perforated pans, then drop pans into boiling water. Cook time should be based on the pasta shape. When cooking is done, remove the perforated pan from the water.
- Leftover pasta can be cooled for use in cold salads or frozen for later use.
  - To cool pasta, place in a container or pan with a large surface area to stop carry-over cooking and place in refrigerator. Sheet trays and two-inch pans work well.
- Carry-over cooking time greatly affects the quality of the pasta's texture.

## HOW TO COOK PASTA

- Utilizing the infographic, review the process for cooking pasta.
- Review the embedded training video.

***After we review the infographic and video, there will be an activity to reinforce skills learned.***

## Culinary Quick Bites

BASIC FOOD PREPARATION SKILLS

## HOW TO COOK PASTA

Here is an overview of the steps you can follow to cook perfect pasta every time:

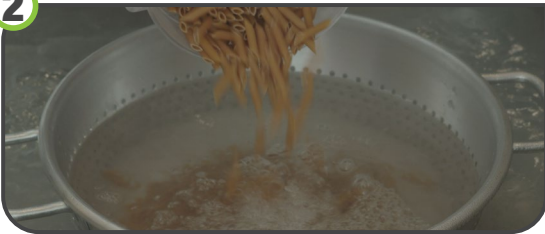
### COOKING IN A TILT SKILLET

1



Bring water to a boil and insert a strainer or 6-inch-deep perforated steam table pan.

2



Add the pasta to the strainer and stir.

3



Cook the pasta until it almost reaches *al dente* (4-6 minutes). The pasta will be tender but still have a little resistance when bitten.

4



Carefully remove the pasta from the boiling water by lifting the strainer from the tilt skillet and allow it to drain.

5



Place in a pan for service or cool and store for use later.

## Culinary Quick Bites

BASIC FOOD PREPARATION SKILLS

## HOW TO COOK PASTA

### COOKING IN A STEAMER

1



Place dry pasta in a 2-inch perforated steam table pan with a non-perforated 2-inch steam table pan underneath.

Add water to cover the pasta, and cover the pan with a lid.

2



Place the pan of pasta in the steamer. Cooking time will vary depending on the type of steamer.

3



Remove the pan from the steamer and check doneness.

4



Carefully drain the pasta and pan for service or cool and store for use later.



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## How to Cook Pasta

### WATCH THE VIDEO

<https://vimeo.com/879569235/4849013444?share=copy>

### QR CODE

Utilize the QR code embedded to the right to share the video with staff utilizing handheld devices such as smartphones and tablets. Use the photo app on the smart device to scan the code to be directed to the video.



# ACTIVITY

## SETUP

### MATERIALS:



Whole grain pasta  
(amount based on  
your service needs)



Lid  
(or foil)



Equipment: steamer,  
oven, tilt skillet, or  
stove top



Water  
(amount based on  
your service needs)



Strainer



2- or 4-inch hotel/  
steam table pan (size  
based on your service  
needs)



Infographic: How to  
Cook Pasta  
– 1 per person

**NOTE:** Participants will be working together to cook pasta. Determine the quantity to prepare based on the number of servings needed for your service.

## SETUP INSTRUCTIONS FOR FACILITATOR

- 1** Prior to the training, gather all of the materials needed for the activity. Choose the method of cooking that best fits your service and kitchen equipment. Set up a workstation for each participant with the utensils and ingredients needed to prepare the recipe.
- 2** During the activity, remember to monitor and observe staff as they practice their culinary skills.

# ACTIVITY

## ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS

- 1** Refer the participants to the infographic and the recipe. Then read the instructions for the activity. Ask the participants if there are any questions before beginning the activity.
- 2** Instruct all participants to wash their hands and put on single-use gloves before starting.
- 3** As a group, the participants will prepare cooked pasta to incorporate into their weekly menu. Complete the cooking process and encourage the participants to taste the final product.
  - Instruct participants to take their time and practice their culinary skills.
  - Discard waste.

## POST ACTIVITY

- After completing the hands-on activity, recap the lesson with the participants. Offer an opportunity for participants to share their learning experience during the training and highlight any tips or takeaways they want to share with the group.
- If time allows, facilitate a discussion with the participants. Suggested discussion topics include:
  - Ask participants to describe how proper cooking of pasta products can assist in improving meal quality.
  - Ask participants in what form or dishes their students would enjoy seeing pasta on menus.
- Ask if the participants feel more comfortable cooking pasta products or want more time to develop the skill further if time allows.
- Plan the next training session based on the needs of your staff.





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