15 Best Fat-Burning Italian Foods
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Shawn Wells, R.D.
15 BEST FAT-BURNING ITALIAN FOODS

Over the last decade or so, a Mediterranean-style diet has been promoted as an effective tool to support heart health, as this style of eating has been shown to lower the risk of cardiovascular disease and improve many of its risk factors, including blood sugar management, blood pressure, and lipid levels (e.g., cholesterol, triglycerides). What’s more, there’s substantial evidence that a Mediterranean-style diet can also sharpen one’s mind.

For instance, in a recent study published in the journal *Frontiers in Nutrition*, researchers from Australia performed an extensive review, analyzing the current body of studies examining the effect of the Mediterranean Diet on cognitive health.¹ They found that those folks who followed a Mediterranean Diet showed slower rates of cognitive decline, reduced incidence of Alzheimer’s disease, and improvements in cognitive function.

Attention, memory, and language also improved with the Mediterranean Diet, and memory, in particular, was positively affected with improvements in delayed recognition, long-term memory, working memory, executive function, and visual constructs.

With regard to weight management, numerous studies have shown that the Mediterranean Diet is an effective strategy for weight loss. While there's no single “best” diet, the Mediterranean Diet has the potential to be a useful tool for those who are interested in optimizing their health and the way they look and feel.²

Perhaps you may be wondering what exactly a Mediterranean-style diet includes, and that would be a very good question, as it is often broadly defined. Generally speaking, the Mediterranean Diet is characterized by the following:³
• Abundant use of extra virgin olive oil
• High consumption of plant foods, such as:
  - Fresh fruits and vegetables
  - Legumes
  - Minimally-processed whole grains
  - Nuts
  - Seeds
• Frequent but moderate intake of wine (especially red wine)
• Moderate consumption of:
  - Fish and seafood
  - Fermented dairy (e.g., yogurt, cheese)
  - Poultry
  - Eggs

Of course, what you may recognize as its hallmark, the Mediterranean Diet uses olive oil as its major source of fat—as many as eight servings daily. What’s more, a Mediterranean-style Diet contains as many as nine servings of vegetables, two servings of fruit, and over 30 grams of fiber.4

Just as important as what’s included in the Mediterranean Diet is what’s not. The Mediterranean Diet is characterized by low consumption of red and processed meats, but more importantly, the Mediterranean Diet is largely void of added sugar, sweets, processed foods, refined flour, industrial vegetable and seed oils (e.g., soybean oil), excessive saturated fat, and trans fats, which are all characteristic of a Western-style diet (i.e., Standard American Diet).3,5

Interestingly, researchers have noted recent changes in the nutritional patterns in the Mediterranean area involving increased intake of refined carbohydrates (e.g., added sugars, refined flours) and saturated fats and concomitant reductions in fiber intake. This “Western-influenced” Mediterranean diet has led to reduced health benefits, increased incidence of overweight and obesity, and decrements in metabolic health.6

Unfortunately, when it comes to what most of us have come to know, recognize, and enjoy as Italian food has been Westernized. In other words, most of the Italian foods that we eat are made with refined flours, added sugar, vegetable and seed oils,
saturated fat, etc.—unlike what’s common with a true Mediterranean-style diet. In fact, these foods may be more accurately described as Italian-American dishes.

One key additional note to point out is that a Mediterranean-style diet is just one component of the overall Mediterranean lifestyle, and while the nutritional component is indeed an important one, the other pieces of the puzzle cannot be overlooked. For instance, the Mediterranean lifestyle is known to involve regular physical activity, sharing meals with other, enjoying life, being outdoors, properly managing stress, and incorporating plenty of purposeful rest and sleep.

Once again, this is a prime example that good health and weight management are not about a single food or special diet; there’s no magic bullet. Rather, it’s the whole approach; it’s about getting all of your “big rocks” in order. So, take a moment to examine your life and look at all of the pieces of the puzzle. What are you doing well? What are some places where there’s room for improvement? How’s your stress management practice? What’s your relationship with sleep and relaxation? How much physical activity are you getting and how much time are you spending outdoors? How much positive social interaction are you getting?

While the following covers some of the prominent staples of a Mediterranean-style diet, we also wanted to help put a healthy spin on some of your favorite Italian–American dishes.

Buon appetito!

1. Olives & Olive Oil

While definitions of the Mediterranean Diet vary, there are certain constants, and the most prominent is that extra virgin olive oil is a staple. It’s the chief source of dietary fat with upwards of eight servings a day included. While it may come as somewhat of a surprise, Mediterranean-style diets typically provide up to 37 – 40% of total calorie intake from fat—Up to 50% of which comes from monounsaturated fats (predominantly extra virgin olive oil).
Extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) is naturally abundant in a polyphenol called oleocanthal, which has been shown to promote a healthy inflammatory response. Specifically, oleocanthal acts as a “natural anti-inflammatory compound” by inhibiting the activity of cyclooxygenase (COX) enzymes, a property it shares with the highly-recognizable NSAID ibuprofen.8,9

“By inhibiting these enzymes, inflammation and the increase in pain sensitivity associated with them is dampened,” says Dr. Paul Breslin, co-author of a recent study published in the *Journal of Neuroscience* in which researchers identified the unique mechanism underlying the oral stinging sensation shared by oleocanthal and ibuprofen.10

Along those lines, researchers have found that a Mediterranean diet, which is rich in EVOO, confers a number of health benefits, some of which seem to overlap those attributed to NSAIDs.11,12

In a study published in the journal *Atherosclerosis*, researchers examined the antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects of extra virgin olive oil. Healthy participants were divided into three groups, each one receiving a meal with a different type of oil: Extra virgin olive oil (EVOO), olive oil (OO), or corn oil (CO). The researchers found that only when the folks consumed meals with EVOO (not OO or CO), they experienced significant decreases in inflammatory markers (e.g., TXB2, LTB4) along with increases in markers of antioxidant capacity within two hours of the meal.13 While the EVOO and OO had nearly identical fatty acid compositions, the EVOO contained nearly 38 TIMES more health-promoting polyphenols.

In addition to oleocanthal, there are a number of other polyphenols (e.g., oleuropein, hydroxytyrosol) in EVOO that provide antioxidant activity and promote a healthy inflammatory response.14 In fact, Italian researchers have found that oleuropein, a compound that is similar in structure to oleocanthal, exerts anti-inflammatory effects.15 Even more, animal studies have shown that oleuropein possesses anti-obesity effects, reducing weight gain and belly fat when mice are overfed a high-fat diet.16

In terms of “how much,” the evidence suggests that around 3 tablespoons or so of extra virgin olive oil may be needed daily to derive the research-backed benefits.
2. Cheese & Yogurt

Fermented dairy foods, such as cheese and yogurt (e.g., Greek yogurt), are staples of traditional Mediterranean-style diets, which recent landmark research has confirmed to reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease (CVD), have beneficial effects on cognitive and metabolic health, and promote healthy weight management.

While the relative contributions of fermented dairy foods had not previously been established, a recent study published in the *British Journal of Nutrition* seems to confirm that fermented dairy foods (e.g., cheese, yogurt) “are integral to diets that are protective against CVD.” Studies suggest that regular consumption of fermented dairy foods such as these may be associated with reduced inflammatory biomarkers. One study found that adults from the Mediterranean region who consumed higher amounts of fermented cheeses (e.g., feta cheese, hard yellow cheese) demonstrated significant reductions in key biomarkers of inflammation (e.g., C-reactive protein, IL-6, TNF-alpha).

What’s more, despite what you may have been led to believe, studies also show that fermented dairy foods such as cheese do not have a negative effect on LDL cholesterol levels. The same also appears to be true for yogurt. Along these lines, when it comes to dairy, it’s important that you “don’t fear the fat!”

If you’re like many, it’s been engrained in your head to avoid full-fat dairy and to instead opt for skim, fat-free, or reduced-fat versions. Current evidence suggests that this standard of care may be misguided. In a recent study published in the *Journal of Nutrition*, researchers from Brazil found that people who ate the most full-fat dairy were less likely to develop metabolic syndrome, which is characterized by excess belly fat, insulin resistance, high blood pressure, and abnormal cholesterol levels.

What’s particularly interesting is that the researchers suspect that the health benefits associated with full-fat dairy “seem to be mediated by dairy saturated fatty acids.” Gasp! The authors concluded, “Dietary recommendations to avoid full-fat dairy intake are not
supported by our findings,” a conclusion that is supported by additional research. In a study published in the journal *Nutrition Research*, researchers from Luxembourg found that, among a large study population, folks who consumed the most full-fat dairy—cheese and yogurt—had the lowest odds for obesity and abdominal obesity.\(^{20}\)

Although this seems to fly in the face of what you’ve been told to be “healthy” for years, it comes with the backing of Harvard researchers, *Time* magazine, NPR, and various health professionals in addition to numerous studies published in peer-reviewed journals.

Further, observational research has shown that yogurt consumption is negatively associated with weight gain.\(^{21}\) Of course, properly fermented yogurt is also a potential source of beneficial bacteria (i.e., probiotics). Research indicates that the gut flora (i.e., the bacterial ecosystem) of obese folks differs significantly from that of thin people.\(^{22}\) Along these lines, recent research published in the *British Journal of Nutrition* suggests that certain probiotics from the *Lactobacillus* family of bacteria, which are prominent in Greek yogurt, may help you lose weight and keep it off.\(^{23}\)

Greek yogurt also contains a unique protein called lactoferrin, which has immunity optimizing properties and anti-microbial activity.\(^{24}\) In one randomized double-blind, placebo-controlled trial, researchers found that athletes consuming lactoferrin-rich colostrum (i.e., milk) for two weeks experienced significantly reduced intestinal permeability (i.e., “leaky gut”).\(^{25}\)

It’s important to note that when we’re talking about yogurt, the emphasis is on plain versions—not sugar-sweetened, fruit-flavored yogurt. Also, calories *do* matter; so, if you make the switch to eating more full-fat fermented dairy, it’s important to be aware of how doing so may affect your overall energy intake.

### 3. Red Wine

Over the last several years, the health benefits of moderate red wine consumption have become increasingly clear. Like many of the other dark, rich-colored fruits, red wine (i.e., grapes) is a rich source of antioxidant polyphenols (e.g., anthocyanins).\(^{26}\)
One of the best-known polyphenols found in red wine is resveratrol. A number of studies have demonstrated the anti-inflammatory activity of resveratrol and its ability to promote a healthy inflammatory response. Like oleocanthal (found in EVOO) and a number of other polyphenols, resveratrol seems to exhibit its anti-inflammatory activity mostly through inhibition of the COX enzymes, which has the potential to promote a healthy inflammatory response. Resveratrol also seems to modulate the body’s inflammatory response by reducing both the production of inflammatory molecules as well as the formation of free radicals.

Another means by which resveratrol may exert its health benefits is by mitigating the effects of advanced glycation end-products, which can be consumed exogenously (i.e., food) or produced endogenously. AGEs play a role in accelerating the aging process.

Resveratrol has also been purported to prevent obesity, and a number of studies have demonstrated the anti-obesity super powers of this polyphenol. For instance, research has shown that resveratrol decreases the synthesis of fat and reduces the uptake of fat by the body’s fat cells. In addition, resveratrol increases the body’s ability to burn fat for fuel (in the muscles and liver).

Interestingly, resveratrol has been shown to “brown” white adipose tissue (i.e., body fat), and along these lines, it also seems to increase metabolic rate and calorie expenditure via activation of brown adipose tissue (BAT) thermogenesis. Simply put, BAT is unique in that it burns body fat to produce heat (i.e., thermogenesis), and as a result, BAT thermogenesis is currently being investigated as an anti-obesity target.

While resveratrol seems to be the most popular antioxidant associated with red wine, the beneficial effects of red wine cannot be solely accounted for by this polyphenol due to its low concentration and bioavailability. In a recent study published in the journal *PLoS One*, researchers from Hungary demonstrated that malvidin, the most abundant anthocyanin polyphenol in red wine, possesses potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory activity, and the effects of malvidin “at least partially account for the positive effects of moderate red wine consumption.”

This is important to note because it highlights that a combination of red wine polyphenols—not a single compound—may be needed to derive the touted health
benefits. Thus, moderate amounts of red wine—one glass (i.e., 5 ounces) per day for women and 1 – 2 glasses per day for men—may be optimal. It’s important to note, however, that drinking alcohol in excess appears to increase the body’s production of pro-inflammatory molecules, according to researchers from the University of North Carolina.  

4. Meatballs

When many people think of Italian food, one of the first things that comes to mind is spaghetti and meatballs. While we’ll touch on the spaghetti portion of the equation shortly, this section will focus on the meatballs. Traditional meatballs aren’t “bad” by any means; however, they can be improved upon by eliminating the refined carbohydrates (i.e., bread crumbs) that are commonly used. Here’s one of our favorite meatball recipes from the good folks at PaleoLeap™.

**Ingredients:**

- 1 ½ lbs. ground beef or lamb
- 1 egg, beaten
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, minced
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 1 tbsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp dried mint
- salt and pepper

**Directions:**

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. In a bowl, combine ground meat, egg, parsley, garlic, tomato paste, oregano, mint, and season with salt and pepper to taste.
3. Mix with hands until everything is well combined.
4. Form mixture into equally-sized meatballs using your hands.
5. Place meatballs on a baking sheet and bake in the oven for 20 – 25 minutes.
6. Serve with a salad of greens and squeeze of lemon or with roasted root vegetables.

5. Lasagna

Lasagna is a classic Italian-American dish, and most of what we have learned to enjoy has been Westernized with copious amount of pasta made with refined flour. We know how delicious lasagna is, and we knew that we had to find a healthier way to make it without sacrificing taste. So, we made a simple swap: zucchini noodles for traditional flour-based noodles. We love it, and we think you will too!

Ingredients:

- 2 large zucchini
- 1 tbsp salt
- 1 lb. ground beef
- 1 ½ tsp black pepper
- 1 green bell pepper, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 cup tomato paste
- 1 16-ounce can tomato sauce
- ¼ cup red wine
- 2 tbsp fresh basil, chopped
- 1 tbsp fresh oregano, chopped
- hot water, as needed
- 1 egg
- 1 15-ounce container low-fat ricotta cheese
- 2 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 16-ounce package frozen spinach, chopped, thawed, and drained
- 1 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
- 8 ounces fresh mozzarella, shredded
1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Grease a deep 9 x 13-inch baking pan with olive oil.
2. Slice zucchini lengthwise into very thin slices. Sprinkle slices lightly with salt; set aside to drain in a colander.
3. To prepare meat sauce, cook and stir ground beef and black pepper in a large skillet over medium-high heat for 5 minutes. Add in green pepper and onion; cook and stir until meat is no longer pink. Stir in tomato paste, tomato sauce, wine, basil, and oregano, adding a small amount of hot water if sauce is too thick. Bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer sauce for about 20 minutes, stirring frequently.
4. Meanwhile, stir egg, ricotta, and parsley together in a bowl until well combined.
5. To assemble lasagna, spread ½ of the meat sauce into the bottom of prepared pan. Then layer ½ zucchini slices, ½ ricotta mixture, all of the spinach, followed by all of the mushrooms, then ½ the mozzarella cheese. Repeat by layering the remaining meat sauce, zucchini slices, ricotta mixture, and mozzarella. Cover with foil.
6. Bake for 45 minutes. Remove foil; raise oven temperature to 350 degrees and bake an additional 15 minutes. Let stand 5 minutes before serving.

6. Spaghetti Carbonara

Is your mouth watering? Ours too. Like lasagna, traditional pasta dishes get the kibosh because they’re loaded with noodles made from refined flour, a hallmark of their Westernization. Guess what? You don’t have to forgo delicious dishes like spaghetti and meatballs or spaghetti carbonara. All you have to do is swap out the waist-expanding flour-based noodles with zucchini noodles or spaghetti squash, like the recipe below from Rebecca Bohl.

**Ingredients:**

- 1 medium spaghetti squash
- Extra virgin olive oil, for drizzling
- Salt and pepper
- 8 ounces bacon
• ½ yellow onion, diced
• 2 clove garlic, minced
• 2 eggs
• ¼ cup coconut milk
• 1 tsp dried oregano
• 1 tbsp fresh parsley, chopped

Directions:
1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F.
2. Place the spaghetti squash in the microwave for 3 – 4 minutes to soften.
3. Use a sharp knife to cut the squash in half lengthwise. Scoop out the seeds and discard.
4. Place the halves, with the cut side up, on a rimmed baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper.
5. Roast in the oven for 45 – 50 minutes, until you can poke the squash easily with a fork.
6. Let cool until you can handle it safely. Scrape the insides with a fork to shred the squash into spaghetti strands.
7. In a small bowl, whisk together the eggs, coconut milk, oregano, ¼ teaspoon salt, and a generous dash of pepper until completely combined.
8. When squash is baking, cook bacon in a skillet over medium heat. Remove to a paper towel-lined plate, crumble, and set aside.
9. Discard bacon grease, reserving about one tablespoon. Add onion and garlic to the pan and sauté for 4 – 5 minutes until soft.
10. Stir in the shredded spaghetti squash.
11. Add half of the crumbled bacon to the pan and stir to incorporate.
12. Turn down the heat to the lowest setting. Slowly pour the egg mixture into the squash, stirring vigorously. Continue stirring constantly for 1 – 2 minutes so that the eggs do not scramble until the egg mixture forms a creamy sauce over the squash noodles.
13. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Top with remaining crumbled bacon and fresh parsley. Serve immediately.
7. Creamy Chicken Fettuccine

By now, you’ve likely caught on to the theme that many Italian-American dishes are less than desirable given that they’re loaded with heavily refined carbohydrates (e.g., flour-based noodles). What’s more, dishes like fettuccine alfredo include cream sauces that are calorie-dense.

That being said, we’d be lying if we said we didn’t know how delicious that fettuccine dishes are. That’s why we love this recipe, which includes zucchini (as a noodle substitute) and cauliflower (as the base for the “cream” sauce) from Kelly at Primally Inspired.

**Ingredients** (for chicken):
- 4 chicken breasts
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp balsamic vinegar
- 2 tbsp fresh basil
- 1 tbsp fresh oregano
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- salt and pepper

**Ingredients** (for Alfredo sauce):
- 1 head cauliflower, cut into florets
- 8 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup butter or ghee, melted
- 4 cups chicken stock
- salt and white pepper
- ½ cup Romano cheese (optional)

**Ingredients** (for noodles):
- 2 – 4 zucchinis or yellow summer squash, spiralized into noodles using a spiralizer
• 1 tbsp olive oil or butter
• salt
• pinch of garlic powder

Directions:
1. Mix together olive oil, balsamic vinegar, herbs, and salt and pepper in small bowl.
2. Pour the marinade over the chicken and marinate in the fridge for at least 1 hour up to 24 hours.
3. When it’s finished marinating, preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
4. Using a skillet, brown both sides of the chicken breasts over medium-high heat, approximately two minutes per side.
5. Once both sides are seared/browned, transfer the skillet to the oven (or put them in a baking dish) and cook the chicken until cooked through—about 20 – 25 minutes depending on the thickness of the breasts. Let sit 5 – 10 minutes before serving.
6. For the Alfredo, put the cauliflower florets and chicken stock in a large pot. Bring to a boil.
7. Reduce heat, cover, and let cook for 10 – 15 minutes or until tender.
8. Meanwhile, put the butter in a skillet over medium-low heat and melt.
9. Once melted, add garlic to the skillet and cook for 2 minutes or until softened and fragrant. Set aside.
10. Once the cauliflower is tender, do not drain the chicken stock. Instead, transfer the cauliflower to a blender or food processor using a slotted spoon.
11. Add to the blender/food processor 1 ½ cups chicken stock, garlic/butter, salt and pepper, and Romano cheese.
12. Process for a few minutes until the sauce is completely smooth and creamy.
13. For the zucchini/squash noodles, add olive oil, zucchini noodles, salt and pinch of garlic powder to a skillet over medium heat and cook for a few minutes until the noodles are done to your liking. Drain off any water.
14. Add the cooked zucchini noodles to each plate. Add a hefty helping of Alfredo sauce and top with chicken.
8. Chicken Parmesan

Chicken Parmesan is one of our absolute favorite Italian dishes. The classic version, unfortunately, includes copious amounts of refined carbohydrates (in the chicken breading and the noodles), and the chicken is typically fried in industrial vegetable/seed oils. Not good for your health or your waistline. But, Chicken Parm is oh-so-good…and the great news is that you don’t have to give it up. In fact, this version from Abel James is so good that, if you’re like us, you’ll prefer it over many restaurant versions. Buon Appetito!

Ingredients:

• 2 – 3 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken breasts, butterflied or sliced in half lengthwise
• ¼ cup almond flour (or coconut flour)
• 1 tbsp onion powder
• 1 tbsp garlic powder
• ½ tsp red pepper flakes
• ½ tsp salt
• 3 eggs
• 2 tbsp butter, plus more as needed
• 1 jar organic tomato sauce (no added sugar)
• Mozzarella cheese (optional)
• Mixed greens
• Extra virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.
2. Whisk eggs in a bowl until frothy. Set aside.
3. In a separate bowl, mix together the almond flour, onion powder, garlic powder, red pepper flakes, and salt.
4. Dip the chicken breasts into the eggs, then dredge them in the almond flour mixture.
5. Melt the butter in a skillet over medium heat.
6. Place the chicken breasts in the skillet and cook until golden brown and the juices run clear, about 3 minutes on each side. Cook in batches, if needed, and add more butter to the pan as needed.
7. Fill a 9 x 13-inch baking dish halfway with tomato sauce and place the chicken breasts in the sauce, cover with foil, and roast in the oven for 10 minutes.
8. Uncover and top each piece of chicken with a slice of mozzarella cheese (if using). Bake, uncovered, for 10 minutes more.
9. Serve topped with fresh chopped basil (optional) and a side salad of mixed greens drizzled with olive oil and balsamic vinegar.

9. Risotto

Traditional risotto is delicious. While it can be made with rice and still be very healthy, if you’re interested in controlling the carbs (especially the refined carbs), then we think you’ll love the following recipe, which replaces white rice with cauliflower rice, from Mark’s Daily Apple.

Ingredients:
- 2 heads of cauliflower, cut into small chunks
- 4 – 6 pieces of bacon, cut into small pieces
- 1 small yellow onion or large shallot, finely chopped
- 2 stalks of celery, finely chopped
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- ¾ lb. mushrooms, thinly sliced
- ½ cup chicken stock
- Optional toppings: Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, butter, finely chopped fresh herbs

Directions:
1. In small batches, put the cauliflower chunks into a food processor. Process until the cauliflower has the consistency of rice. Set aside.
2. Cook the bacon in a wide pot or skillet over medium-high heat. After a few
minutes, add the onion/shallot, celery, and garlic. If the bacon hasn’t released enough fat, add a little bit of olive oil or butter to the pot.

3. Sauté for 3 minutes then add mushrooms. Sauté for 5 more minutes. Again, if the pot/skillet seems dry, add olive oil or butter. Season mushrooms lightly with salt and pepper.

4. Add 8 cups of cauliflower rice. If you have less than 8 cups, don’t worry about it. If you have more, reserve the extra for another meal.

5. Add the chicken stock. Put a lid on the pot and cook the cauliflower 5 – 7 minutes until tender but not completely mushy.

6. Before serving, flavor risotto with freshly grated cheese, butter, and/or fresh herbs (e.g., basil, parsley).

10. Sweet Potato Bruschetta

Bruschetta is a tasty appetizer, but it’s nearly always made with bread made from refined flour. Instead of bread, we found a better option that uses sweet potato slices.

Ingredients:
- 1 sweet potato
- Oil of choice (coconut, olive, or butter/ghee)
- Red wine vinaigrette (3 parts olive oil to 1 part red wine vinegar, minced garlic, salt and pepper)
- 2 – 3 tomatoes, chopped
- black olives, chopped
- fresh basil, chopped
- fresh Parmesan cheese

Directions:
1. Peel and slice sweet potatoes lengthwise, about ¼” thick.
2. Brown sweet potato slices in a skillet over medium heat using the oil of your choice.
3. Cook until al dente (about 10 minutes) and golden brown.
4. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.
5. Mix tomatoes, basil, and olives in enough red wine vinaigrette to coat them.
6. Lay sweet potato slices on baking sheet and top with spoonfuls of tomato mixture and Parmesan.
7. Place in baking sheet in oven for 10 minutes.

11. Mediterranean-Style Halibut

Fish and seafood are staples of traditional Italian and Mediterranean cuisine and so are veggies and fruits like artichokes, shallots, capers, and lemon. This recipe from PaleoHacks fuses all of this awesomeness into a single, easy-to-make recipe. If your mouth isn’t already watering, it sure will be!

Ingredients:
- ¾ lb. halibut
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- ½ cup fresh salsa or pico de gallo
- ½ cup artichoke hearts
- 1 shallot, thinly sliced
- 2 tbsp capers
- 4 slices lemon
- salt and black pepper

Directions:
1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees and lightly grease a baking dish with olive oil or coconut oil.
2. Season both sides of halibut with salt and pepper and place in the baking dish.
3. Spoon fresh salsa on top of the halibut filet and place the lemon slices over the salsa.
4. Arrange the artichoke hearts and sliced shallots around the filet and sprinkle capers over everything.
5. Cover the baking dish with aluminum foil and bake for 14 – 16 minutes or until the fish flakes easily with a fork.
6. Serve with roasted or steamed vegetables.
12. Chicken Piccata

Chicken Piccata is another delicious staple of Italian-American cuisine. Unfortunately, some of the very same problems with Chicken Parmesan are also suspect with traditional versions of this dish (e.g., refined flour, industrial vegetable/seed oils). Worry not, you don’t have to kick Chicken Piccata to the curb; in fact, we think you’ll find this recipe from ComfyBelly® to be one of the best that you’ve ever tried!

Ingredients:

- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, butterflied and cut in half (4 thin chicken breasts)
- salt and ground black pepper
- ¼ cup almond flour
- 4 tbsp butter or ghee, divided
- 4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, divided
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- ½ cup chicken stock
- ¼ cup brined capers, drained and rinsed
- ¼ cup fresh parsley, chopped

Directions:

1. Season chicken breasts with salt and pepper.
2. Place almond flour on a plate. Dredge the chicken in the flour; shake off excess.
3. Warm a large skillet over medium-high heat and melt 2 tablespoons of butter/ghee plus 2 tablespoons of olive oil.
4. Once the oil/butter/ghee mixture is bubbling, place two pieces of chicken in the skillet and brown the chicken pieces for a few minutes on each side.
5. Put the browned chicken on a warm plate; add another 2 tablespoons of butter/ghee plus 2 tablespoons of olive oil and brown the other two pieces of chicken. Move them to the warm plate as well.
6. Add the lemon juice, stock, and capers to the pan and bring to a boil. Scrape the brown bits from the pan.
7. Place all the chicken back in the skillet and simmer for 5 - 7 minutes or until the chicken is tender and cooked through.
8. Garnish with parsley and serve with roasted or steamed veggies, quinoa, or cauliflower rice.

13. Grilled Pesto Shrimp

Pesto…yum! Shrimp…delicious! When you put these two staples of Mediterranean cuisine together, the result is succulent. Enjoy!

Ingredients:
• 2 lbs. shrimp, peeled and deveined
• ½ cup extra virgin olive oil
• 2 cups basil leaves
• 3 garlic cloves, minced
• ¼ tsp red pepper flakes
• ¼ cup pine nuts
• Salt and black pepper
• Wood or metal skewers

Directions:
1. Preheat grill to medium-high heat.
2. Add olive oil, basil, garlic, red pepper flakes, pine nuts, and salt and pepper (to taste) in a food processor.
3. Pulse until smooth.
4. In a bowl, combine shrimp and pesto, and toss until well coated.
5. Let sit at room temperature for 10 – 12 minutes.
6. Thread the pesto shrimp onto the skewers and place on the preheated grill.
7. Cook 3 – 4 minutes per side.
8. Serve over a bed of cauliflower rice, with a green salad, or with a side of grilled or roasted vegetables.
14. Caprese Salad

Traditional Caprese salad, which is made to resemble the colors of the Italian flag (i.e., red, white, and green), is made with tomatoes, fresh mozzarella, basil, and olive oil. While the traditional recipe is deliciously healthy, we like the addition of avocado as you’ll see in the recipe below.

**Ingredients:**
- 4 medium tomatoes (consider experimenting with heirloom tomatoes)
- 3 medium avocados
- 8 oz. fresh mozzarella (optional)
- 1 large bunch fresh basil
- 1 lemon, juiced
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Balsamic vinegar
- Salt and black pepper

**Directions:**
1. Cut the avocado around the equator and remove the pit. Slice into rounds then remove the peel. Lightly toss the avocado rounds with lemon juice.
2. Slice tomatoes and salt lightly.
3. Slice mozzarella (if using).
4. Layer tomato slices, mozzarella (if using), avocado slices, and basil leaves.
5. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

15. Pizza Margherita

Pizza! Is there anything more delicious or Italian? The term pizza was first documented back in the 10th century in a
manuscript written in Central Italy. Naples, Italy, is credited with the invention of modern pizza, and Pizza Margherita is often regarded as archetype of Italian-style pizza; like the Caprese salad, it embodies the colors of the Italian flag: red (tomatoes), green (basil), and white (cheese).

Unfortunately, like many other Italian dishes that have been Westernized and turned into fast food, modern pizza is a combination of refined flour, added sugar, industrial vegetable/seed oils, and processed meats. Instead, we prefer this version from George at Civilized Caveman Cooking. It takes a little more time to prepare, but it’s worth it—and it won’t leave you feeling guilty, lousy, and lethargic.

**Ingredients** (for crust):
- 2 cups almond flour
- ½ cup arrowroot flour
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 2 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 tsp dried marjoram
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp onion powder
- ¼ cup coconut oil, melted
- 2 eggs

**Ingredients** (for sauce):
- 14 oz. crushed fire-roasted tomatoes
- 6 oz. tomato paste
- 1 clove garlic, pressed
- 2 tbsp onion, finely minced
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1 tsp dried basil
- salt and pepper
Ingredients (toppings):
  • ½ cup buffalo mozzarella
  • 1 medium tomato, thinly sliced
  • 10 basil leaves

Directions:
1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees F.
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine almond flour, arrowroot flour, baking powder, salt, black pepper, oregano, basil, marjoram, garlic powder, onion powder, coconut oil, and eggs.
3. Mix thoroughly until a dough forms.
4. Roll the dough into a ball and place it on a parchment-lined baking sheet.
5. Flatten the dough to a consistent thickness of ¼ inch, forming it into a rectangle or circle.
6. Bake the dough for 20 minutes or until it becomes a firm crust.
7. While the crust is baking, make the sauce.
8. In a medium saucepan, heat the fire-roasted tomatoes and tomato paste over medium heat.
9. Add the pressed garlic, minced onion, oregano, basil, and salt and pepper.
10. Stir to combine and let the sauce simmer while the crust is baking.
11. When the crust is done, smooth a small portion of the sauce on the pizza, using more or less depending on your preference.
12. Less sauce will yield a crispier pizza while more sauce will yield a softer pizza. Be careful, however, as too much sauce will make it difficult to pick up the pieces.
13. Add the mozzarella, tomato, and basil toppings on top of the sauce and bake the pizza for an additional 20 minutes.
14. Turn up the heat to 400 degrees F after 20 minutes and cook for an additional 5 minutes.

Buon Appetito!

Westernized versions of Italian food are a far cry from traditional Mediterranean-style eating. They’re loaded with refined flours, added sugar, industrial vegetable/seed oils, and processed meats. Not only that, the Americanization also involves massive portion sizes, which lead to equally massive waistlines. Isn’t it great to know that you can incorporate
delicious traditional Italian dishes into an overall healthy diet with a few modifications?

In addition to these recipes, it’s not a bad idea to shift overall dietary patterns and food choices to a more Mediterranean-style, which is characterized by the abundant use of extra virgin olive oil, high consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables, legumes, minimally-processed whole grains, nuts, and seeds, frequent but moderate intake of red wine, and moderate consumption of fish and seafood, fermented dairy, poultry, and eggs.

While the diet is indeed a key reason why folks in Mediterranean regions enjoy great health, remember that it’s likely the whole lifestyle approach—not just a couple tablespoons of olive oil. Along those lines, often overlooked is that the traditional Mediterranean lifestyle also involves regular physical activity, sharing meals with others, enjoying life, being outdoors, properly managing stress, and incorporating plenty of purposeful rest and sleep. How are you doing in these areas?
References:


20. Crichton GE, Alkerwi A ’a. Whole-fat dairy food intake is inversely associated with obesity prevalence: findings from the Observation of Cardiovascular Risk


