

# Pasta key to healthy sustainable diet, says Italian celebrity chef

Massimo Bottura is teaming up with food experts to promote the health and environmental benefits of the Italian staple

**Stephanie Kirchgaessner in Rome**

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Hotdogs are being compared with cigarettes and sugar is no-no, but in a week of contrasting dietary advice one of Italy's most famous chefs is making the case for an old staple whose reputation is increasingly under threat from modern fads - pasta.

Massimo Bottura, the chef behind the three Michelin starred Osteria Francescana in Modena, which is ranked second in a 2015 list of the world's best restaurants, is part of a campaign aimed at rehabilitating the Italian favourite.

Bottura is teaming up with food experts to hail a sensibly-sized portion of pasta as a sustainable and healthy meal. He rejects espousing an overly nostalgic view as some do in Italy, but says chefs should embrace pasta as a way of defending biodiversity and championing the use of grains over animal protein. The effort is part of a drive to counter the messages of paleo and gluten-free diets.

“Not only are grains more sustainable, but they can become even more sustainable if certain measures are adopted,” he said.

Bottura advocates a new way of thinking about pasta that could be controversial in Italy. It calls on chefs to work with farmers and the industry to make good-tasting pasta using alternative grains such as quinoa.

Bottura said the key to maintaining a healthy lifestyle was not only to eat pasta, but also to eliminate as many animal fats as possible and to use more olive oil, fresh herbs and seasonal fruit and vegetables.

“You gain weight if you eat like 200 grammes of pasta with carbonara [made with eggs and bacon] and after that you take a nap, because the style of life today is not like 100 years ago. If you mix vegetables and a plate of pasta and a little fruit, and the right amount, it is totally enough,” he said.

In a statement released on Tuesday as part of a campaign to promote pasta, experts from universities around the world say it is not fattening if the portion size is correct and the sauce not too high in calories.

They add that pasta could be used as a vehicle to encourage people to eat a mostly plant-based Mediterranean diet, which reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease and strokes.

The campaign is led by a US non-profit organisation called Oldways, which says it gets some of its funding from corporate sponsors.

Sara Baer-Sinnott, Oldways' president, believes there is a lot of confusion about pasta, thanks in part to the popularity of the paleo diet, which is based on the types of foods presumed to have been eaten by early humans and is high in protein and low in carbohydrates, and the gluten-free movement.

“There are people who understand gluten and suffer from coeliac disease [a digestive and auto-immune disorder], but there is also a lot of confusion,” she said.

“All sorts of products are being marked ‘gluten-free’, like chicken, which is crazy. Next there will be gluten-free water.”

She added that efforts to avoid wheat were often based on pseudo-science.

According to the statement released on Tuesday, diets that are successful in promoting weight-loss emphasise a range of carbohydrates, protein and fat.

“All these three macronutrients, in balance, are essential for designing a healthy, individualised diet anyone can follow for their life. Moreover, very low carbohydrate diets may not be safe, especially in the long term,” the statement said.

On Monday the World Health Organisation said processed meats such as bacon, ham and sausages ranked alongside cigarettes as a cause of cancer. The WHO released a report saying there was enough evidence to rank processed meats as group 1 carcinogens because of a causal link with bowel cancer.

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