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Eating pasta helps you lose weight, says Italian study



Some spaghetti eaters, eating spaghetti CREDIT: GETTY

By **Henry Bodkin**

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Eating pasta is not fattening and actually decreases the chances of becoming obese, a new Italian study has found.

For centuries Mediterranean diets have enjoyed a healthy reputation, but in recent years more and more people have been shunning pasta, believing it to be fattening.

A new survey of more than 23,000 people, however, has linked pasta consumption to both lower body mass and waist-to-hip ratio.

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carbohydrates”

Dr Gunter Kuhnle, University of Reading

Published in the journal Nutrition and Diabetes, the study said pasta consumption is associated with better weight management in part because it often occurs as part of a healthy Mediterranean diet.

But researchers at the IRCCS Neuromed Institute in Italy also found that the correlation between pasta intake and lower obesity rates occurred independently of overall diet.

Publication of the paper comes amid a fierce debate in the UK between supporters of official dietary advice, which advocates eating a wholesome intake of carbohydrates but small amounts of fat, and those who argue that fat is not fattening but that carbohydrates should be avoided.

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The new Italian study has already been seized by some UK nutritionists as evidence that carbohydrates have been “unfairly demonised”.

George Pounis, the paper’s lead author, said: “We have seen that consumption of pasta, contrary to what many think, is not associated with an increase in body weight, rather the opposite.

“Our data shows that enjoying pasta according to individuals’ needs contributes to a healthy body mass index, lower waist circumference and better waist-hip ratio.”

Many previous studies have demonstrated how a Mediterranean diet, with its heavy emphasis on fruit, vegetables, fish and whole grains, is one of the healthiest nutritional

regimes in the world.

However, very little research has studied the specific role of pasta.

Licia Lacoviello, head of molecular and nutritional epidemiology at the Neuromed Institute, said the current trend of people cutting out pasta from their diets in an effort to lose weight was unjustified.

“In light of this research, we can say that this is not a correct attitude,” she said.

“We’re talking about a fundamental component of Italian Mediterranean tradition, and there is no reason to do without it.

“The message emerging from this study, is that Mediterranean diet, consumed in moderation and respecting the variety of all its elements, is good to your health.”

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The findings came from a project which began in 2005, originally intending to identify genetic factors underlying cardiovascular disease, cancer and other conditions.

Dr Gunter Kuhnle, Associate Professor in Nutrition and Health at the University of Reading, said the Italian researchers’ methodology appeared sound.

“In this context, it is however important to understand that pasta intake cannot be seen in isolation but that it is part of a dietary pattern

“In this study, people who consumed a lot of pasta also followed a traditional “Mediterranean diet”, which is not surprising as the study was conducted in a Mediterranean population.

“Pasta intake could therefore be mainly a marker for adherence to this kind of diet.

“What is interesting, however, is that these results clearly show that it is wrong to demonise carbohydrates as the data clearly show that consumption of a carbohydrate-rich food such as pasta does not have an adverse effect on body weight.”

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