

# Cheesy Baked Pasta

Cooking Skill Level:  
Easy - Moderate

Prepare Ahead  
Double Recipe & Freeze

Number of servings: 6-8

Total time: 75 minutes

## Ingredients:

- 1 lb penne pasta (or other)
- salt
- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 lb ground beef, or ground pork
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 3 to 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp dried basil
- 1 tsp Italian seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon red pepper flakes

- 4 cups jarred marinara or pasta sauce
- Black pepper, to taste
- 8 ounces mozzarella cheese, shredded
- 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 1 cup ricotta cheese (or additional shredded mozzarella cheese)

Note: Add some chopped vegetables to the sauce to boost texture, flavour, nutrients, & fibre!

## Instructions:

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

### 1. Cook the pasta:

Heat a large pot of salted water (for every 2 cups of water, ~ ½ tablespoon of salt) to a strong boil. Add the pasta and cook at a rolling boil, uncovered, until the pasta is *al dente*—edible but still a little firm to the bite.

Drain the pasta through a colander. Toss with a little olive oil so the pasta does not stick together while you make the sauce.

### 2. Cook the meat:

While the water is heating in the previous step, start on the sauce. Heat a tablespoon of olive oil in a large sauté pan on medium-high heat. When the oil is shimmering hot, add the ground meat. Break up any large chunks of sausage as it cooks. Cook well.

Don't stir that often or it will be more difficult for the meat to brown. Sprinkle with a little salt.

### 3. Make the sauce:

When the meat is mostly browned, add the onions and stir well to combine. Sauté everything until the onions are translucent and beginning to brown, about 4 to 5 minutes.

Add the garlic, basil, Italian seasoning, and red pepper flakes and stir to combine. Cook 1 minute, then add the tomato sauce and stir well. Bring to a simmer.

Taste the sauce and season with salt and pepper, if needed.

4. Assemble the casserole:

Spread a thin layer of the sauce in the bottom of a 9x13-inch casserole pan, then dot the surface with half the ricotta cheese (or some of the mozzarella if not using ricotta cheese). Ladle a spoonful of sauce into the pasta, stir it well and then add the pasta into the casserole.

Pour the rest of the sauce over the pasta, dot the remaining ricotta cheese (or some of the mozzarella) over the pasta, and sprinkle on top both the remaining mozzarella and the Parmesan cheese.

5. Bake:

Bake uncovered in the oven at 350°F until the top is lightly browned and the cheese melted, about 20 to 25 minutes. Let stand for 10 minutes before serving.

**Tips for Preparing Ahead:**

Refrigerating and then baking an assembled, unbaked pasta:

Cover the assembled ziti with foil and refrigerate up to 24 hours. To bake, remove the foil and bake at 350°F until the top is lightly browned and the cheese is melted. Expect to add at least 15 more minutes baking time than if you had baked it right after assembling.

Freezing and then baking an assembled, unbaked pasta:

To bake frozen unbaked ziti, it's best to thaw it in the refrigerator overnight. Take it out of the fridge 30 minutes before baking. Remove any plastic wrap. Bake, uncovered, 350°F until lightly browned and bubbly, 60 to 70 minutes. Cover with foil if the top browns before the inside is fully heated.

Freezing and reheating a baked pasta:

Bake, covered with foil, at 350°F. (Make sure you remove any plastic wrap first.) Reheat thawed or frozen; the time will depend on the pan itself, and how frozen the lasagna is. Expect it to take at least 35 to 45 minutes, but check to see that it hits 165°F in the center.

Nutrition Facts: Per serving*		
Calories	560	% Daily Value
Protein	32g	
Carbohydrate	47g	16 %
Fibre	6g	26%
Sugars	12g	
Fat	30 g	45 %
Sodium	1341mg	56 %

\* Approximate amounts



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