

Healthy Options Award



Italian & Pizza restaurants

Adapting your menu

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Italian and Pizza Restaurants / Takeaways

Healthy catering is not about removing lots of existing dishes from the menu and replacing them with healthier alternatives. Although you may decide to introduce some totally new dishes, the main emphasis is on making small changes to existing dishes. This may be changing some of the ingredients used, the proportions of each component or how the food is prepared / cooked. Healthy catering is also about promoting the healthier options so customers are more aware of the choices available.

This information sheet is designed to be used alongside the Food Standards Agency (FSA) document, 'A guide to Healthy Eating', which gives general details about how to provide healthy options for your customers. The FSA document also gives information on how to qualify for the Healthy Options Award and how to promote healthier foods to customers.

This information sheet gives more specific ideas that are tailored to **Italian restaurants** and also **Pizza restaurants and takeaways**.

Bread, pasta and other starchy foods

A balanced meal should be based around starchy foods, which in an Italian style restaurant would mainly be bread, pasta and pizza base. Rice and potatoes are further starchy foods.

Bread –

- Offer a range of breads, including ciabatta and focaccia, without added butter / oil.
- Offer an option of wholemeal / granary breads.
- Where olive oil is used, offer separately (e.g. olive oil and balsamic vinegar dip)
- Offer pizzas with *thick* bases (see 'Pizza' section)

Pasta –

- Do not add salt to the cooking water. Salt does have a small affect on the flavour of pasta, but has no effect on how quickly it cooks. There should be no need to add salt as the pasta will be combined with a flavoursome sauce (if salt is currently added, gradually reduce the amount until it is removed completely).
- Offer pasta which has not been cooked or tossed in fat / oil. Try rinsing cooked pasta in hot water to prevent it from sticking together.
- If oil is added to cooked pasta, use a minimal amount of olive oil, rather than butter.
- Offer some wholewheat pasta dishes (or mixed half white, half wholewheat pasta).
- Try making lasagne with wholewheat pasta sheets, or green spinach lasagne sheets (Lasagne Verdi).
- Have some lower fat pasta sauces on the menu (e.g. tomato based) and offer some pasta with less sauce (see 'Sauces, stocks and dips' section below).

Pizza base –

- Offer an option of *deep pan*, *thick* pizza bases. This will increase the starchy portion of the meal, in line with the Balance of Good Health.
- Cheese stuffed bases are higher in fat. If offered, try to use a lower fat cheese (reduced fat mozzarella).
- Try offering a pizza base with half white and half wholemeal flour.

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Rice -

- In Italian restaurants, rice is mainly used for risotto:
 - Use a minimal amount of olive oil to toast the rice, rather than butter.
 - Bought-in stock / broth can be high in salt, try to make homemade broth without added salt.
 - Do not add parmesan when cooking risotto, allow customer to add their own.
 - Try to include some vegetables in the risotto recipe, e.g. pumpkin, mushroom.

Potatoes -

- If potato dishes are available, steam or boil the potatoes in a minimal amount of unsalted water, rather than fry.
- If potato Gnocchi are on the menu, try to steam the potatoes rather than boil. When boiling the gnocchi, gradually reduce the amount of salt in the water until it can eventually be removed completely. Serve with a tomato sauce, rather than butter or creamy sauce.
- If roasted potatoes are available (e.g. rosemary potatoes), use large chunks of potato and roast with a little olive oil.
- If chips are on the menu, use *thick, straight cut* chips or *wedges* as these absorb less fat than thin chips / fries. Do not add salt to chips, allow customers to add their own.
- Bought-in 'seasoned' or 'Cajun' fries / wedges may contain added salt. Offer a plain alternative, or season in-house with spices such as paprika and black pepper.

Fruit, vegetables and salads

Fruit and Vegetables –

- A balanced diet should contain lots of fruit and vegetables so have plenty of options available for pizza toppings and include a variety in pasta sauces.
- There are a range of different fruits and vegetables that can be used as pizza toppings, or within pasta sauces:

- tomato chunks	- cherry tomatoes	- onion	- spring onion
- peppers	- mushroom (e.g. porcini)	- sweetcorn	- olives
- courgette	- broccoli	- aubergine	- spinach
- artichoke	- fennel	- jalapeno peppers	- pineapple
- Adjust the proportions of ingredients in pasta sauces and pizza toppings to have *extra* fruit and vegetables and less meat.
- Where possible, oven-bake, steam or stir-fry vegetables in a minimal amount of oil.
- Try including beans and pulses in the menu (e.g. cannellini bean and tuna salad, lentil pasta sauce, or add lentils to bolognese sauce).
- Have vegetable side dishes available (e.g. French beans, spinach (without cream)).
- Offer fruit as a dessert and have fruit juice as a drink (see '*Desserts*' and '*Drinks*').

Salads / Insalata –

- Offer salad starters, side dishes and main dishes, including a variety of different salad items and vegetables (e.g. rocket, cucumber, spinach, cherry tomatoes, grated carrot, green beans, cannellini beans, sweetcorn etc.)
- Some salads, such as Caesar salad, have high fat dressings. Offer salads without dressing, or with reduced fat dressing in a separate container (vinegar / lime based).

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- If potato salad or coleslaw is available, use reduced fat mayonnaise.
- If shaved parmesan and croutons are usually served with salads, reduce the amount used, or offer separately to customers. Try *baking* croutons with olive oil, not butter.

Milk and other Dairy products

- The dairy products used mainly in Italian cooking are cheese (inc. goats cheese), milk, cream and butter. However, due to the high fat content of cream and butter these would be classed in the Balance of Good Health as 'foods containing fat'. See the '*Reducing Fat, Sugar and Salt*' section below.
- *Cheese* – The cheeses most commonly used in Italian cooking (e.g. mozzarella, parmesan, ricotta, pecorino romano) are quite high in fat and / or salt:
 - Allow customers to sprinkle cheese on top of pasta sauce, don't add automatically.
 - Offer alternatives to creamy / cheesy pasta sauces and fillings (see '*Sauces, stocks and dips*' section)
 - Offer reduced fat cheese (e.g. reduced fat mozzarella) where possible.
 - Reduce the amount of cheese added on top of pizzas.
 - Offer a pizza option *without* cheese.
- Where possible, replace some of the cream with semi-skimmed milk.
- If butter is used, try to replace with olive oil.

Meat, fish and alternatives

Red Meat –

- Use lean meat where possible and cut visible fat off meat, such as lamb / steak / veal.
- Use lean mince for bolognese dishes and skim fat off the top when cooking.
- If meatballs are made in-house, use *lean* mincemeat. If bought in, try to buy a lower fat / lean version.
- Smoked and cured meats (e.g. pancetta, prosciutto, salami, pepperoni) are generally high in *salt*, so reduce the amount of these meats used in pasta sauce and on pizza. If served as a starter, offer less meat and serve with bread, salad or fruit (e.g. melon and parma ham).
- Bought-in processed meats (e.g. spicy beef / spicy pork for pizza toppings) can contain high levels of fat and salt. Where possible, replace with lower fat / salt alternatives.
- Oven bake, grill or stir-fry meat in a minimal amount of olive oil.
- When roasting / oven baking meat, use a roasting rack to drain excess fat away.
- Drain off fat / oil floating on the top of pasta sauces and meat soups.

Poultry and Eggs –

- Where possible, remove the skin from poultry, such as chicken.
- Oven bake, grill or stir-fry in a minimal amount of monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil.
- When roasting / oven baking poultry, use a roasting rack to drain excess fat away.
- Bought-in processed poultry (e.g. Cajun chicken for pizza toppings) can contain high levels of fat and salt. Where possible, replace with lower fat / salt alternatives, or add spices and seasoning in-house (without using salt).
- If using eggs, try to make without the use of cream or butter (e.g. oven-baking eggs on pizza topping). If a scrambled egg is made, use semi skimmed milk instead of whole milk or cream. Make in a non-stick pan with a minimal amount of olive oil.

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Fish –

- Try to include a variety of white fish, oily fish and shellfish in your menu. Examples in Italian cooking could include:

White fish – Halibut, Seabass, Monkfish, Cod, Tuna (tinned)

Oily fish – Salmon, Sardines, Tuna (fresh), Swordfish, Anchovies

Shellfish – Prawns, Mussels, Calamari

- Use on pizza toppings and include in pasta sauce, as well as offer fish main courses.
- Offer unbattered and non-fried fish and seafood – Steam, poach, grill, oven bake or stir-fry in minimal amount of olive oil.
- Some processed fish can be high in salt (e.g. tinned tuna in brine, anchovies). Where possible, buy a non-salted version (e.g. tinned tuna in spring water), or reduce the amount of anchovies on top of pizza.

Meat alternatives –

- Offer a range of vegetarian starters and main dishes, such as vegetable pizza and pasta dishes.
- Make sure that there are some vegetarian dishes that are *not* cheese-based.
- Try including an alternative protein source, such as beans and pulses in some vegetarian dishes (lentil pasta sauce, or add pine nuts to vegetable pasta sauce).
- For another protein source, include hard boiled egg in some vegetarian salad dishes.

Reducing Fat, Salt and Sugar

Tips on how to reduce fat, salt and sugar can be found in most sections of this guide. Further tips and general reminders for adapting recipes and cooking methods are as follows:

- Offer meat, poultry and fish dishes that are oven baked, grilled, steamed, poached or stir-fried in minimal olive oil.
- Replace butter with olive oil. Olive oil is mainly monounsaturated, which is a healthier choice than saturated fats. However, all fats are high in calories, so reduce the quantity of oil used.
- Try to serve pasta without being tossed in oil / butter.
- If deep frying, do not double or re-fry food as it increases fat absorption further. Only offer a limited number of fried dishes and use a monounsaturated / polyunsaturated oil that is suitable for deep frying (e.g. rapeseed/canola, corn). Use optimum frying temperatures (look at the recipe/packet or fryer instructions, but usually between 180-190°C), as a reduced temperature can lead to increased fat absorption.
- Creamy and cheesy sauces / fillings are high in fat (see '*Sauces, stocks and dips*' section below). Try to reduce the amount of whole milk and cream in sauces and replace with semi skimmed milk where possible (e.g. in Béchamel sauce). Use reduced fat cheeses.
- Try reducing the amount of white sauce in lasagne and increasing the tomato sauce.
- Reduce the amount of salt added to foods. Do not add salt to sauces, vegetables, risotto, potatoes or chips.
- Do not add salt to pizza bases or toppings. Check bought-in dough / sauce for added salt.

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- Use other ways to enhance the flavour of the food, such as garlic, herbs, spices, black pepper and lemon, instead of salt.
- Offer alternatives to sugary desserts and drinks (see sections, 'Sauces, stocks and dips', 'Desserts' and 'Drinks').
- *Sauces, stocks and dips*
 - Some sauces contain high levels of fat, salt and/or sugar. Ready-made / bought-in sauces, stocks and dips can have particularly high levels.
 - Try to make sauces and stocks in-house and reduce the amount of oil / fat, salt and sugar added.
 - Offer a range of tomato based sauces. Where a dish is currently being served with a cheese sauce, offer tomato sauce as an alternative (e.g. cannelloni baked in tomato sauce rather than cheese sauce).
 - Where creamy sauces are made, consider whether it is possible to replace some of the cream with milk. Also, consider reducing the amount of sauce added to pasta.
 - Where cheese sauces are made, use a reduced fat cheese. Use a mature, stronger flavour cheese as less will be needed. Also, consider reducing the amount of cheese sauce added to pasta.
 - If a dish contains both creamy and tomato sauces (e.g. lasagne), try to reduce the amount of creamy sauce and increase the tomato sauce.
 - When serving sauces with meat, fish or poultry dishes (e.g. steak with cream & pepper sauce), serve sauce in a separate dish so customers can add as little or as much as they like.
 - In some pizza restaurants, dips may be available with pizzas and starters (e.g. BBQ, sour cream, sweet chilli, ketchup, salsa). These bought-in dips can be high in fat, salt and sugar. Do not give out automatically, only provide if requested by customer. Also have healthier alternatives (e.g. tomato salsa, reduced fat mayonnaise).
 - If sweet sauces are served with desserts, give customers the option whether to have sauce, reduce the amount used and offer a reduced sugar option (e.g. real fruit coulis).

Examples of less healthy **Italian starters / Antipasto** and the healthier alternatives:

Less healthy options – high in fat / sugar / salt	Healthier options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dry cure and smoked meats / sausage - pancetta, prosciutto, salami, pepperoni, carpaccio • Garlic bread (inc. cheese topped) • Mushrooms / Prawns in garlic butter • Deep fried calamari / whitebait / mushrooms / prawns • <i>Deep fried</i> cheese • <i>Deep fried</i> chicken pieces / wings • <i>Deep fried</i> potato skins • Salads with creamy dressings (e.g. Caesar salad) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non creamy soups e.g. Minestrone • Bruschetta • Ciabatta • Breadsticks (grisini) • Grilled sardines • Olives, sun dried tomatoes • <i>Oven baked</i> cheese (e.g. goats cheese) • <i>Grilled / oven baked</i> chicken pieces • Salads e.g. tomato, mozzarella & basil, rocket salad (dressing served separately) • Steamed / grilled mussels or prawns • Roasted peppers, Pimento peppers

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Examples of less healthy **main course dishes** and the healthier alternatives:

Less healthy options – high in fat / sugar / salt	Healthier options
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sauces containing cream +/- or cheese e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Carbonara - Alfredo - Marsala with cream - Spinach with cream/cheese - Primavera with cream/cheese • Dishes made with creamy / cheese sauce e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lasagne - Cannelloni with cheese sauce - Pasta parcels with ricotta • Sauces with minced meat, or salty meat e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bolognese sauce - Pancetta sauce • Buttery sauces e.g. Piccata • Pizza with <i>thin base</i> (or <i>cheese stuffed base</i>) and high fat / salt toppings (e.g. cured meats / pepperoni, processed meats, 'meat feast', extra cheese, anchovies) • Risotto with butter & cheese added • Potato gnocchi with cream/cheese sauce • Al Calzone (pizza parcel) filled with lots of cheese, cured meats / sausage, <i>deep fried</i> • <i>Fried</i> fish and shellfish • Salads with creamy, high fat dressings (e.g. Caesar salad) • <i>Thin cut deep fried</i> chips/fries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sauces based on tomato e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Neapolitan - Arrabbiata - Marinara - Al pomodoro - Fra Diavolo • Dishes made with tomato based sauces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chicken / Fish Cacciatore • Vegetable based sauces e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spinach (<i>non creamy</i>) - Primavera (<i>non creamy</i>) • Bolognese sauce with <i>lean</i> mince and fat skimmed off. • Piccata sauce made with olive oil • Wholewheat / spinach pasta • Pizza with <i>deep pan, thick base</i> and lower fat toppings (e.g. vegetables/fruit, tuna, prawns, chicken, ham, reduced fat cheese) • Risotto without butter and cheese added (use olive oil and broth) • Potato gnocchi with tomato sauce • Al Calzone (pizza parcel), <i>baked</i> with tomato, vegetables, ham and less cheese • <i>Grilled / oven baked</i> Chicken • <i>Steamed / boiled / grilled / oven baked</i> fish / shellfish • Salads with dressing served separately (olive oil / vinegar / lemon based) • <i>Chunky, thick cut</i> chips / potatoes, roasted in olive oil, instead of deep fried.

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- *Desserts*

- Desserts and puddings are often high in sugar and fat.
- Try to include fruit based desserts, such as fresh fruit salad, that include a range of fruit.
- Use canned fruit in fruit juice, rather than syrup.
- Offer sorbet as an alternative to ice-cream / gelato.
- Try offering a real fruit coulis with ice-cream, rather than sugary fruit flavour sauces.
- Allow customer to decide whether they would like cream / ice-cream / custard served with their dessert, or if they would like it plain.

Examples of less healthy **desserts** and the healthier alternatives:

Less healthy options – high in fat / sugar / salt	Healthier options
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chocolate / cream / cheese / egg based desserts e.g.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Tiramisu- Zabaglione- Profiteroles- Crème caramel- Cheesecake• Canned fruits <i>in syrup</i>• Gelato / Ice-cream• Deep fried desserts e.g. doughnuts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fresh Fruit salad (with fruit juice, not syrup)• Canned fruits <i>in fruit juice</i>• Sorbet

- *Drinks – cold / chilled*

- Soft 'fizzy' drinks are often high in sugar, so always have healthier options available (see examples below).
- Have *unsweetened* fruit juice available. Look out for those labelled "Fruit juice drinks" as they usually contain added sugar, so should be avoided where possible.
- Have full fat milk available for 1-5 year olds.
- If squash is available, use a 'no added sugar' variety.
- Have bottled mineral water (still / sparkling) and artificially sweetened 'diet' soft drinks available.
- Provide a jug of water at each table.

- *Drinks – Hot*

- Milk and sugar are often added to hot drinks, so healthier options should be available. Offer semi skimmed or skimmed milk and have artificial sweeteners available as an alternative to sugar.
- Speciality coffees that are topped with cream can contain high levels of fat and sugar.
- Offer teas and herbal teas (e.g. mint tea).

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Children's / smaller meals

- Have smaller portions available for children (at a reduced price). Make sure there are smaller portions of the *healthier* options available.
- If there is a dedicated children's menu, make sure it contains healthier options and not just options with chips. The menu could include pasta in fun/cartoon shapes, or mini deep pan pizzas with healthier toppings (e.g. tuna, sweetcorn & spring onion or ham, mushroom & pineapple).
- If the children's menu includes desserts, offer healthier options, such as fruit salad, fruit kebabs, yoghurt or sorbet.
- If ice-cream is part of the children's menu, offer options with fruit (e.g. strawberries and ice-cream), rather than ice-cream with chocolate / fruit flavour sauce or sweets.

Display, pricing and marketing

- Buffets / self service counters (if relevant) – Include healthier options and make sure there are plenty of starchy foods available (e.g. white and wholewheat pasta, bread), along with healthy salad and vegetable options. Promote the healthier options by having information cards next to the dish that state what it contains (e.g. 'Healthy but Tasty - Pasta alla Primavera – Penne pasta with oven baked tomatoes, peppers, mushrooms and a hint of garlic')*.
- Try promoting the healthier dishes as 'specials' or 'dish of the day', but do not increase the price as this may put customers off.
- If 'Meal deals' are available, offer healthier options for starters, mains, desserts and drinks.
- Try highlighting the healthier options on your menu, using a logo next to the healthier dishes.
- Make sure staff are aware of the healthier options and promote them to customers.
- Consider using some price promotions for the healthier options (e.g. offer a portion of mixed roasted vegetables half price with every order or free plain ciabatta with every pasta meal).
- *N.B. If providing information about the food available, make sure any claims are correct and not misleading (e.g. be cautious about making claims such as 'low fat', 'fresh' or 'traditional').

FOOD ALLERGIES AND INTOLERANCES

Note: A small number of people suffer from allergies to food. In the UK, peanuts, milk, eggs and fish are the foods that commonly cause severe allergic reactions, along with tree nuts, sesame seeds and shellfish. For such people, minute quantities of the nut or other food can have rapid and fatal effects.

Refer to the FSA document, 'A guide to healthy eating' for further sources of information.