

New Mexico State University

Extension Family and Consumer Sciences

What Is Protein Pasta?

Protein pasta is any pasta product marketed as higher in protein than traditional wheat pasta. It can be made from foods like lentils, chickpeas, peas, or beans, but not all protein pastas are created equal. Protein pasta is any pasta product marketed as higher in protein than traditional wheat pasta. Protein pastas may be made from:

Whole food ingredients (lentils, chickpeas, black beans)
Refined or isolated ingredients (pea protein isolate, wheat gluten, additives)

Key Point: The nutritional quality depends less on the label claim and more on how processed the food is.

Understanding Food Processing

Not all processing is bad. Many healthy foods are processed in simple ways. Examples of minimally processed foods:

- Dry beans and lentils
- Whole grain flour

Plain pasta made from one or two ingredients

Ultra-processed foods, on the other hand, are foods that:

- Contain ingredients not commonly used in home kitchens
- Are highly formulated for taste, texture, or shelf life
- Often include additives such as emulsifiers, gums, flavorings, or isolated proteins

Research consistently shows that diets high in ultra-processed foods are linked to poorer health outcomes.

Why This Matters for Protein Pasta?

Some protein pastas are made from simple ingredients like lentils, peas, beans.

Others are made from protein isolates and additives, making them ultra-processed.

Key Point: Protein alone does not make a food healthy. The ingredient list tells the real story.

Resources

New Mexico State University Extension: Nutrition Facts Label, <https://pubs.nmsu.edu/e/E136/index.html>

Dietary Guidelines for Americans, 2025–2030:
<https://MyPlate.gov>



Better Choices:

- Ingredients you recognize
- Foods you could find in a typical kitchen

Examples: Lentil flour, Chickpea flour
Whole wheat flour, Water

Limit or Avoid:

- Ingredient lists that include ingredients you wouldn't cook with at home
- Added protein isolates or texture agents

Examples: Pea protein isolate, Modified food starch, Xanthan gum, Mono- and diglycerides, Artificial flavors

Contact:

Dr. Zahra Zadeh, RDN, PhD
Extension Nutrition Specialist
Tel: 575-646-3097
email: zzadeh@nmsu.edu
or visit: aces.nmsu.edu



BE BOLD. Shape the Future.
**College of Agricultural, Consumer
and Environmental Sciences**

New Mexico State University is an equal opportunity employer and educator.
NMSU and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.