Kale Spaghetti

As part of building a healthy eating pattern, *The Dietary Guidelines for Americans* recommends you choose a good mix of foods by consuming a variety of nutrient dense foods across and within food groups. A nutrient dense diet comprised of a variety of foods is the best way to assure that your body gets what it needs for optimal health and performance.

Ideally, you should fill your plate with mostly fruits and vegetables for most meals; choose, fruits and vegetables as snacks most of the time. A great goal to strive for is eating at least 8 servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Just remember that fruits are typically higher in calories than vegetables so if you are trying to keep your calories in check, then aim for 2-3 servings of fruits and 5-6 servings of vegetables per day.

Vegetables are grouped into 5 subcategories, based on their nutrients. Dark green leafy vegetables, like kale, collards, mustard and turnip greens, chard, etc. are nutrient powerhouses because they are loaded with fiber, vitamins and minerals, and other key phytonutrients. They are typically low in calories and fall under the subcategory of dark green vegetables. Studies show these vegetables not only promote brain health and help you better manage stress, but they also may help protect against diabetes, heart disease, bone fractures and some cancers. Even with the known health benefits of dark green vegetables, Americans still are not eating enough of them. Adults should eat at least 2 cups of dark green vegetables per week.

Here are some tips to help you meet recommended weekly amounts for dark green vegetables:
- Sauté some finely chopped greens in olive oil and add them to your casseroles, tomato sauce, pasta dishes, and stir-fries, or just add them directly to your soups.
- Top your sandwiches with baby spinach leaves or dark leafed lettuce; or, use collard greens or dark leaf lettuce as the "wrap" for your wraps in place of soft tortillas.
- Add spinach to your scrambled eggs or omelets.
- Mix in chopped kale and spinach with typical salads.
- Serve as dish by sautéing chopped greens in some olive oil, a little balsamic vinegar and a little garlic, cooking them until the desired tenderness.

This quick, meatless meal features kale, whole grain pasta, and heart healthy almonds. It offers a tasty twist to the typical tomato sauced spaghetti.

Directions:

Serves: 4

1. Wash and dry 1 bunch of kale. Remove the leaves from the stems; cut the leaves into bite sized pieces to equal about 8 cups. Peel and thinly slice 1 medium red onion.

2. Begin cooking 6 oz. of whole wheat spaghetti noodles according to the package directions. When pasta is finished, drain it, but reserve about ½ cup of the water.

3. While the pasta is cooking, heat 2 tbsp. of olive oil in a large skillet and then add the red onion, ¼ tsp. of salt, a few dashes of black pepper, ¾ tsp. of garlic salt (or use two minced cloves). Continue cooking the onions, while occasionally stirring until they are tender and a little brown (4-5 minutes). Add the kale, and a 14 oz. can of petite diced tomatoes (drained). Toss and cook until the kale is tender.

4. Add the reserved pasta water and cooked noodles to the mixture. Toss until the ingredients are well mixed. Add ⅓ cup of chopped almonds and ¼ cup of grated parmesan cheese; gently toss to mix.

5. Serve each plate with ¼th of the pasta mixture, topped with just a little more grated parmesan cheese, alongside a piece of fresh fruit or a serving of canned no-added-sugar fruit.

Notes:

To make the dish heartier and increase the amount of protein in the meal, add in 6-8 oz. of cooked shrimp or cooked chicken breast at the same time the canned tomatoes are added.

Add a ¼ tsp. of red pepper flakes to the reserved pasta water to make the dish a little spicy.