



How do Italians stay so fit? Get their secrets!

When we think of Italian cuisine, images pop up of steaming pizza dripping with cheese, hearty bowls of spaghetti, and leisurely late-night meals. So how is it possible that Italians tend to be healthier and more slender compared to Americans? The answer lies in a combination of dietary habits, food quality, lifestyle factors, and cultural attitudes towards food and eating.

The Mediterranean Diet: A Foundation of Health

At the core of Italian health is the Mediterranean diet, which emphasizes fresh, whole foods. Italians prioritize vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, and olive oil. This diet is rich in nutrients, antioxidants, and healthy fats, which contribute to better heart health, lower rates of chronic diseases, and overall well-being. Unlike the standard American diet, which often includes high levels of processed foods, sugars, and unhealthy fats, the Mediterranean diet provides a balanced approach to nutrition.

Portion Control and Quality over Quantity

In Italy, the concept of “*la dolce vita*” encourages savoring food slowly and enjoying meals as a social activity. Portions in Italy are typically smaller than those in America, allowing people to indulge in their favorite dishes without overeating. Italians focus on the quality of their food rather than the quantity, choosing fresh, locally-sourced ingredients that are both flavorful and nutritious.

Mealtime as a Social Event

Mealtime in Italy is a cherished social experience, often shared with family and friends. This cultural practice encourages slower eating, mindful consumption, and better digestion. Eating together reduces the likelihood of overeating, as meals are enjoyed leisurely, allowing time for the body to register fullness.

Active Lifestyles and Daily Movement

Italians naturally incorporate physical activity into their daily routines. Walking is a common mode of transportation, and cities are designed to encourage

pedestrian movement. The Italian lifestyle also includes regular breaks and less sedentary behavior compared to the more car-dependent American lifestyle. This increased daily activity helps maintain a healthy weight and overall fitness.

Late Dinners with a Balanced Approach

While Italians do eat later than Americans, their late dinners are often lighter and balanced. The day's largest meal is typically lunch, so their dinner is more of a mini meal. This meal, like most others, features wholesome ingredients that help counteract the negative effects of late-night eating.

Type of Wheat and Processing Methods

Another important factor is the type of wheat used. Italians typically use durum wheat for pasta and bread, which is higher in nutrients compared to the common wheat used in the US. Traditional Italian milling methods also preserve more of the grain's natural nutrients, resulting in healthier, more filling, and more nutritious wheat products.

Attitude Towards Food and Diet

Italians have a healthy relationship with food, viewing it as a source of pleasure rather than a source of guilt. There is less emphasis on restrictive diets and more focus on enjoying a variety of foods in moderation. This positive attitude towards food contributes to lower stress levels and a more sustainable approach to eating.

We can all stay healthy and slender by focusing on fresh ingredients, portion control, active lifestyles, and a love for good food enjoyed with family and friends. So, go ahead, embrace a bit of *la dolce vita* and find your own slice of Italian wellness!

Escarole and White Beans



This dish is a nutrient-dense, richly traditional Italian favorite! Escarole is a mild-tasting, easy-to-grow leafy green vegetable native to the Mediterranean region. If you can't find it in your grocery store, you can substitute spinach, kale, collard greens, swiss chard, or broccoli rabe. Cooking times do vary for different greens (kale takes far longer than spinach, for example), so taste as the greens simmer.

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 large garlic cloves, crushed or chopped
- 1 pound fresh escarole, chopped
- 3 cups low-salt vegetable or chicken broth
- 1 (15-ounce) can cannellini (white) beans, drained and rinsed
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- Freshly grated parmigiano cheese for serving (optional)

Instructions:

1. Remove the bottom root and inner thick parts of the escarole leaves, and then cut the leaves roughly. Rinse thoroughly in cold water and dry with a salad spinner or a kitchen towel.
2. Chop the leaves and set aside until ready to use.
3. Heat olive oil in a heavy large pot over medium heat. Saute the garlic for about 20 seconds.
4. Add the greens and saute until wilted, about 2 minutes. Add a pinch of salt. Add the broth and beans. Cover and simmer until the leaves are tender and the beans are heated through, about 8 minutes. Stir occasionally.
5. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Add grated parmigiano cheese and serve with crusty bread or alongside pasta.