

# BAKED RIGATONI

If you have the basics on hand, this is a quick weekday meal that also provides plenty of leftovers for packing lunch. My kids are not huge fans of whole wheat pasta, but in this dish they eat it happily.

*Makes approximately 12 portions.*

## **Ingredients:**

- | 1 lb dried pasta—rigatoni, mezzis rigatoni, penne, or other tube shapes are best
- | 16 oz ricotta
- | 8 oz mozzarella, grated
- | 1 c parmesan, grated
- | salt/pepper to taste
- | 2 batches Basic Tomato Sauce
- | 4 oz mozzarella, grated

## **Method:**

1. If you are baking the casserole immediately, preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Bring a large pot of water to a boil, then cook the pasta according to the package directions. When just *al dente*, drain and rinse with cold water.
3. In a large bowl, combine the ricotta, 8 oz mozzarella, and parmesan, and season to taste with salt and pepper.
4. Gently combine the pasta with the cheese mixture.
5. Spread 2 c of tomato sauce in the bottom of a 9"x13" glass or enameled baking dish (metal pans, particularly of the nonstick variety, can be damaged by the acid in the tomato sauce).
6. Spread 1/2 of the pasta in the dish, pour 2 c of tomato sauce over it.
7. Repeat step 6, then sprinkle with the 4 oz of mozzarella.
8. Bake uncovered for 30-45 m, turning the dish part way through. When done, the cheese on top should be golden, and the casserole should be bubbling.
9. Let the dish rest 10 m before slicing and serving.

## **Variations:**

- | Make it vegan: use soy cheese for the mozzarella and parmesan, and replace the ricotta with 15 oz of firm tofu. For this recipe, use the crumbly (not the silken) variety, and remove excess moisture from it by placing it in a strainer over a bowl, topping with a plate, and weighing it down with something—a large can of tomatoes or more plates work well—for 30-60 m.
- | Add a handful of chopped fresh herbs to the ricotta mixture: parsley, basil, oregano, marjoram....

- | Vary the kind of pasta if you need to make the dish gluten free.
- | If you want to add some lean protein to the meal, you can mix up to 3 eggs, lightly whisked, into the ricotta mixture. Cooked, rinsed, and drained beans are also a simple addition. For the carnivores, cooked and drained ground meat, sausage or poultry can be added to the ricotta.
- | I don't believe in hiding/disguising vegetables to get kids to eat them—chopped finely enough, green leafy vegetables such as spinach or kale, cooked and squeezed dry, add a lot of vitamins and don't alter the flavor of the ricotta mixture much.

**Do ahead:**

- | The dish can be assembled completely up to 8 hours ahead of time and refrigerated—make sure it's at room temperature before covering and refrigerating. If you have time, let it come to room temperature again before baking; if not, you may need to increase the cooking time to 45-60 m.
- | If you have a large freezer, the dish can be frozen from its refrigerated state for up to 6 months in a tightly covered casserole dish. If you're cooking for only 1 or 2 people, you can divide it into smaller casseroles and freeze it for multiple meals. Defrost the dish overnight in the refrigerator before baking.