

## Meatballs

The other day I was at the grocery store and I was in a hurry. I had promised the troops I would make spaghetti and meatballs for dinner, but the day had gotten away from me and I did not think I would have enough time. I grabbed a package of frozen meatballs and quickly scanned the ingredient list. Yikes! The list was lengthy and contained numerous things I could not even pronounce—the ingredients sounded like they belonged in a science experiment rather than on the food pyramid. I tossed the package back in the freezer case and headed to the meat department and the produce area. Dinner might be later than usual, but this was one battle I was not going to lose.

If your family loves spaghetti and meatballs as much as mine does, you owe it to yourself and to them to try this recipe. Yes it does take more time than using the frozen variety. But if you make a big batch, you can freeze half and then you can reach for your own delicious frozen meatballs when you are in a time crunch. Freeze them on a lightly greased cookie sheet and then when they are completely frozen, put them in one or two plastic baggies. I like to defrost them for a few minutes in the microwave and then bake them for 15 minutes or so before adding them to the sauce. But if you are using a slow cooker, you can just put the frozen meatballs in the sauce and let it simmer all day.

Even though there are some pretty good bottled spaghetti sauces on the market, it is really simple to make your own. As with everything else, that allows you to control the salt content, as well as the quality of the ingredients. Most importantly, you can add more garlic if you like garlic, or omit it completely. I like to add a splash or two of red wine plus a pinch of sugar, but you can leave that out if you would rather.

## The Best Spaghetti and Meatballs Ever

Extra-virgin olive oil

1 onion, finely chopped

2 garlic cloves, finely minced

¼ tablespoons minced parsley leaves

1 cup milk

4 thick slices firm white bread, crust removed

1 1/2 pounds ground beef

1 1/2 pounds ground pork

1 egg

1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for serving

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

4 cups heated Pomodoro Sauce, recipe follows, or good quality jarred tomato sauce

1/2 pound mozzarella cheese, cut into chunks

Leaves from 3 sprigs fresh basil

1 pound spaghetti

Bring a big pot of salted water to a boil for the spaghetti. Heat 3 tablespoons oil in an ovenproof skillet over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, and parsley and cook until the vegetables are soft but still translucent, about 10 minutes. Take the pan off the heat and let cool.

Pour enough milk over the bread in a bowl to moisten and let it soak while the onions are cooling. Combine the meats in a large bowl. Add the egg and Parmigiano and season generously with salt and pepper. Use your hands to squeeze the excess milk out of the bread and add that to the bowl along with the cooled onion mixture. Gently combine all the ingredients with your hands or with a spoon until just mixed together. Form meatballs quickly and avoid overworking the mixture or the meatballs will be tough.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Heat a 3-count of oil in the frying pan over medium heat and brown the meatballs on all sides, about 10 minutes. Put them into a baking dish and spoon about half of the tomato sauce over. Shower with the mozzarella and drizzle with olive oil. Put the meatballs in the oven and bake until the meatballs are cooked through, about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, cook the spaghetti in the boiling water until al dente, about 8 minutes. Drain and put it onto a large serving platter. Pour on the rest of the sauce and mix well. Spoon the meatballs on top of the spaghetti and garnish with basil leaves. Serve immediately along with extra cheese.

Pomodoro Sauce:

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 medium onion, chopped

3 garlic cloves, chopped

2 (28-ounce) cans whole peeled tomatoes, drained and crushed by hand, liquid reserved

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1/4 cup dry red wine

Pinch of sugar

1/4 cup fresh basil leaves, torn into pieces

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan over medium-low heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook until the vegetables are soft, 4 to 5 minutes. Carefully add the tomatoes and about 1/2 cup of the reserved liquid and season with salt and pepper. Add red wine and sugar. Cook until the sauce is thick, about 15 minutes. Taste and adjust seasoning with salt and pepper. Bring to a boil, stirring for a few minutes with a wooden spoon to further break up the tomatoes. Reduce the heat and let simmer for 20 to 25 minutes. Stir in the fresh basil and season again.

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A variation of the “regular” meatballs, these are flavored with mushrooms, herbs, and parmesan cheese. These are delicious with pasta, rice, mashed potatoes, or my favorite, creamy polenta.

### Meatballs with Mushrooms

1/2 baguette, crust removed (or use day-old thick white bread)  
1 1/4 cups milk  
1 1/2 pounds ground beef sirloin  
1 1/2 pounds ground pork  
1/2 bunch fresh parsley, minced  
1/2 bunch basil, minced  
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped  
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil  
4 eggs  
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan  
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper  
1 cup dried bread crumbs  
1/2 cup onion, finely minced  
1/2 pound chanterelle mushrooms (or any mushrooms), chopped  
1 medium ball fresh mozzarella, grated  
Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Break the baguette in pieces and soak in a bowl with milk for 10 minutes until the bread is soft. In a small skillet, heat a tablespoon of olive oil over medium heat. Add 1/2 cup minced onions and the mushrooms. Cook until

onions are soft and mushrooms have given off their liquid, about 10 minutes. Set aside. In another bowl mix the beef and pork together. Add parsley, basil, and garlic to the meat mixture, mixing with your hands. Avoid over mixing. Squeeze the milk out of the bread and add it in small pieces. Add eggs, Parmesan, cooked mushrooms and onions, salt, and pepper and mix everything together thoroughly. Shape the meatballs into large patties then roll them in the bread crumbs.

In a large skillet heat the olive oil over medium high heat until it begins to smoke slightly. Fry the meatballs to seal the crust, flip them over so both sides are done. Transfer to a large baking dish.

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, and then sprinkle the meatballs with mozzarella.

### Creamy Polenta

1 quart chicken stock  
1 1/2 cups finely ground cornmeal  
1/4 cup heavy cream  
1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan  
3 tablespoons whole butter  
Pinch of salt

In a large saucepan bring the chicken stock to a slow simmer. Quickly whisk the cornmeal into the stock and lower the temperature to keep it from splattering. Cook, stirring frequently for 20 minutes. Stir in the cream, Parmesan, butter, and salt.