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### Does the Flour Make a Difference?

Compared to our great ancestors who were rich if they didn't have to grind their flour themselves, we are living in the lap of luxury. Not even counting all the cake, cookie and brownie mixes on the shelves, just look at all the different kinds of white flour. There are several brands each of all purpose enriched white, unbleached white and self rising. You can find bread, cake and pastry, and maybe instantized as well. I'll skip whole wheat since it was in a previous column.

Of course whole wheat is browner, but what differences are there among the white ones? Does it really make a difference if you use one compared to another? Yes, no and maybe. It depends on what you are making and what you want the finished product to look, feel or taste like. Here's how to decide which one you want when faced with so many white flour choices.

The old standby of course is enriched, bleached all purpose. Enrichment means that several B vitamins that were lost when the hull was removed are replaced. When the technology was developed to remove the bran and germ, white flour was actually healthier than the home ground whole wheat meal or flour. That outside coat, what we now consider the healthy bran, held lots of contamination. Whole wheat flour suffered from a lot more mold, mildew and fungus than the new, dehulled white flour. Now we know that the bran and germ are healthy and we have the handling systems to prevent the spoilage. Some bleaching today is done with ascorbic acid, or vitamin C.

Besides making the flour whiter, bleaching changes the starch. Without bleached flour there would be no cake mixes. Most cake flour is bleached with chlorine gas. Starch in bleached flour absorbs liquid faster. This allows the starch to swell quickly and thicken the batter. Thicker batter can hold more air bubbles so the cake rises better. Bleached flour also catches the butter or oil in the recipe and spreads it evenly through the batter. Now the cake has a more even texture and better flavor too. All the chlorine evaporates and is reused, it's not still in the flour.

Most types of flour differ in the amount of protein they contain. Cake flour has the least protein. That allows cakes to be soft and tender. Bread flour has much more protein. That gives bread its tougher, chewier texture. The extra protein allows it to be sliced into thin slices for sandwiches without crumbling. Pastry flour is similar to all purpose. It has more protein than cake, but not as much as bread flour. This is what allows pie crust and phyllo dough to be stretched out into such thin sheets without falling apart. Semolina and pasta flour have the most protein of all. These flours can be stretched and flattened, pulled and sliced into all the different shapes of pasta, from bowties to elbow macaroni, and still hold their shape.

All purpose flour has a medium amount of protein, but the exact amount varies from region to region. It can be used for most recipes, but the results won't be exactly the same. Cakes made with all purpose flour tend to be a little bit heavier and tougher. Yeast bread made with all purpose flour will be softer and harder to slice thinly. But in a pinch all purpose flour can be used for many, many uses.

Self rising flour is more than flour. It has baking powder and salt added, so you don't have to. If your recipe calls for self rising and all you have is all purpose, add 1 ½

tsp of baking powder and 1/8<sup>th</sup> teaspoon of salt to each cup of flour.

Instantized flour has been partially cooked, then dried and ground again into very fine grains. This allows it to dissolve very quickly. It is great for thickening gravy or sauce, or for making some kinds of tender pastries.

Here's a meat and pasta combination that makes a whole meal in itself. Serve it cold, like pasta salad, or serve it hot for a meal casserole. Just heat it in a baking dish for 30 to 35 minutes at 375° F. And use whatever canned vegetable you like!

#### Hot or Cold One Dish Dinner

2 C dry macaroni	1 C low fat cheese, diced
2 Tbsp chopped onion	¼ C fat free evaporated milk
¼ C sweet pickle relish	1 6 oz can tuna, chicken or turkey
¼ C chopped celery	1 tsp prepared mustard
¼ C low fat salad dressing	1 C (half a can) corn or green peas

Cook macaroni according to directions on the package. Drain the canned meat and the vegetable you want. In large bowl combine macaroni, meat, cheese, celery and onion. In small bowl combine salad dressing, milk and mustard. Mix into macaroni. Gently stir in relish and vegetables. Chill several hours to serve cold, or heat to serve hot.

Serves 6.

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