Meal structure

Traditionally, meals in Italy usually contain 3 or 4 courses. Meals are seen as a time to spend with family and friends instead of immediate sustenance; thus, daily meals can be longer than in other cultures. During holidays, family feasts can last for hours.

Today, the traditional Italian menu is kept mainly for special events (such as weddings) while an everyday menu includes only the first and second course, the side dish and coffee. A notable aspect of Italian meals is that the *primo* or first course, is usually a more filling dish such as risotto or pasta. Italian cuisine also includes single courses (all-in-one courses), providing carbohydrates and proteins at the same time (e.g. pasta and legumes).

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Meal stage	Composition
Aperitivo	apéritif usually enjoyed as an appetizer before a large meal, may be: Campari, Cinzano, Prosecco, Aperol, Spritz, Vermouth.
Antipasto	literally "before (the) meal", hot or cold appetizers
Primo	"first course", usually consists of a hot dish like pasta, risotto, gnocchi, or soup.
Secondo	"second course", the main dish, usually fish or meat. Traditionally veal, pork and chicken are most commonly used, at least in the North, though beef has become more popular since World War II and wild game is found, particularly in Tuscany. Fish are generally caught locally.
Contorno	"side dish", may be a salad or cooked vegetables. A traditional menu features salad along with the main course.
Formaggio e frutta	"cheese and fruits", the first dessert. Local cheeses may be part of the *Antipasto* or *Contorno* as well.
Dolce	"sweet", such as cakes (like Tiramisu) and cookies
Caffè	coffee
Digestivo	"digestives", liquors/liqueurs (grappa, amaro, limoncello, sambuca, nocino, sometimes referred to as *ammazzacaffè*, "coffee killer")

Cacciatore (English pronunciation: /ˌkɑːtʃəˈtɔəriː/) means “hunter” in Italian. In cuisine, *alla cacciatora* refers to a meal prepared “hunter-style” with tomatoes, onions, herbs, often bell pepper, and sometimes wine. *Cacciatore* is popularly made with braised chicken (*pollo alla cacciatora*) or rabbit. The *salamino cacciatore* is also a small salami, popular amongst Italians.

There are many different variations of this dish based upon ingredients available in specific regions. For example, in southern Italy, *cacciatore* often includes red wine, while northern Italian chefs might use white wine.

A basic *cacciatore* recipe usually begins with a couple of tablespoons of olive oil heated in a large frying pan. Chicken parts, dusted with salt and pepper, are seared in the oil for three to four minutes on each side. The chicken is removed from the pan, and most of the fat poured off. The remaining fat is used to fry the onions, peppers or other vegetables for several minutes. A small can of peeled tomatoes (drained of liquid and coarsely chopped) is added to the pan along with some oregano and a half cup of dry red wine. The seared chicken parts are returned to the pan which is then covered. The dish is done after about an hour at a very low simmer. *Cacciatore* is often served with a rustic bread or pasta on the side.