

Beware of Instant Noodles

Repeat tests after 7 years reveal that noodles continue to be unhealthy

A recent advertisement of a popular brand of noodles shows a mother teaching a son to cook noodles so that he is ready for his hostel life. Instant Noodles is an inexpensive quick fix hunger solution for most youngsters. Noodles have become very affordable. They are now varying pack sizes from 70g to 720g. But, have you ever thought whether the hassle free snack is healthy or not.

Ahmedabad based Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC) has tested 9 brands of Instant Noodles for sodium and fat. The results were shocking. All the brands were high on sodium and fat. In the earlier tests of Instant noodles in 2012 and 2014 CERC had found high fat and sodium in most of the brands tested. This shows that the manufacturers have not been responsible in terms of reducing the sodium content.

NUTSHELL

- All nine brands tested were high on sodium as per UK's Food Standard Agency (FSA) recommendations
- FSSAI has not defined any standards for sodium and fat for Noodles

BRANDS TESTED

9 brands of instant noodles 'masala' were procured from Ahmedabad market. The brands were *Maggi 2 Minutes Noodles*, *Ching's Secret Schezwan Instant Noodles*, *Maggi Nutri-licious Atta Noodles*, *Sunfeast Yippee! Noodles*, *Knorr Soupy Noodles*, *Top Ramen Atta Noodles*, *Patanjali Atta noodles*, *Wai-Wai Ready to Eat Noodles* and *Reliance Select Instant Noodles*.

WHAT WE TESTED

Sodium: Major sources of sodium in all processed foods are added salt, and certain food additives. Sodium is an important constituent of fluids present outside and within the cells of our body. A high amount of sodium is undesirable especially for people suffering from hypertension or high B.P., which in turn is linked to stroke & heart diseases.

Fat: Fat is an important constituent of foods that lends better taste, mouthfeel, texture and improves shelf life when present in right amounts. However, consumption of high fat foods may result in obesity and risk of heart disease and type-2 Diabetes.

There are no standards defined by Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) for nutritional parameters such as fat and sodium (salt) in packaged foods. CERC compared the test results against UK's Food Standard Agency (FSA) recommendations [Traffic Signpost Labelling Technical Guidance], which mentions that sodium content of more than 600mg/100g is considered as 'high'. Fat content more than 20g/100g is considered high.

Moisture: High moisture content makes the product susceptible to microbial growth and spoilage, thus affecting its quality. As per FSSAI standards, moisture should be not more than 10% of the weight.

Acid Insoluble Ash: A high value of acid insoluble ash suggests the presence of dust, dirt, stones which get mixed during processing or are present as adulterants. FSSAI limit is maximum 0.3% on dry matter basis.

Acid Value: A high acid value of extracted fat indicates the presence of stale oil/fat which may result in poor quality, low shelf life and in extreme cases even lead to stomach ailments. 2.0 is the maximum limit as per FSSAI.

FSSAI standards were followed for testing moisture, acid insoluble ash and acid value.

Labelling Information: CERC checked the labelling information on the sample packets against the requirements as laid down under the Food Safety and Standards (Packaging & Labelling) Regulations, 2011.

KEY FINDINGS

- All the 9 brands tested were found to be high in sodium content with results in the range of 1093mg/ 100g to 1897mg/ 100g
- The fat content in almost all the brands, although within acceptable range, was on the higher side with the results between 14.2g/100g to 21.2g/100g.
- All 9 brands complied with FSSAI limit for moisture content, acid insoluble ash and acid value.
- Fat and sodium content reduced in four out of the six brands tested from 2012 to 2014. However, both parameters showed increase when tested in 2019 (see table 2).

HOW THE BRANDS PERFORMED

Fat: The fat content was the highest in *Sunfeast Yippee! Noodles* at 21.2g/100g against the labelled 20.3g/100g and the lowest in *Maggi Nutri-licious Atta Noodles* at 14.2g/100g. *Knorr Soupy Noodles* had 17.6g/100g though it claimed to have 15g/100g.

Sodium: Out of the 9 brands tested, highest sodium content was found in *Knorr Soupy Noodles* (1897mg/100g) followed by *Ching's Secret Schezwan Instant Noodles* (1745mg/100g) and the lowest sodium content was in *Maggi Nutri-licious Atta Noodles* at 1093mg/100g.

Labelling Information: All the brands tested were found to be complying with the minimum mandatory requirements as per the FSSA Regulations.

3 brands- *Sunfeast Yippee! Noodles*, *Top Ramen Atta Noodles* and *Reliance Select Instant Noodles* – did not mention the amount of sodium content in the nutritional information given on the label.

Table 1- Instant Noodles: Test Results

Brands	Ranks	Overall Score ¹	Price/100g ² (Rs.)	Sodium Content ³ (mg/100g)	Fat Content ⁴ (g/100g)	Moisture (%)	Acid Insoluble Ash (%)	Acid Value
				more than 600mg/100g is high	more than 20g/100g is high	Max. 10.0	Max 0.3	Max 2.0
<i>Top Ramen Atta Noodles</i>	1	70	21.43	1098	20.6	5.7	0.004	1.2
<i>Maggi 2 Minutes Noodles</i>	2	67	16	1198	15.6	5.5	0.02	1.7
<i>Wai-Wai Ready to Eat Noodles</i>	2	67	16	1348	18.2	3.0	0.03	1.7
<i>Reliance Select Instant Noodles</i>	2	67	24	1200	16.1	6.7	0.02	1.4
<i>Sunfeast Yippee! Noodles</i>	3	65	16.67	1099	21.2	5.4	0.02	1.6
<i>Maggi Nutri-licious Atta Noodles</i>	4	62	25	1093	14.2	5.8	0.16	1.6
<i>Patanjali Atta noodles</i>	4	62	16.67	1299	20.0	4.9	0.02	1.8
<i>Ching's Secret Schezwan Instant Noodles</i>	5	59	16.67	1745	15.8	5.5	0.04	1.8
<i>Knorr Soupy Noodles</i>	6	47	20	1897	17.6	5.3	0.16	1.9

Notes:

¹The Overall Score was calculated by giving the following weightage - Moisture - 20%, Acid Insoluble Ash - 20%, Acid Value - 20%, Fat content - 20% and Sodium Content - 20%.

² Price/100g calculated from MRP and rounded off

³ For sodium content lesser value is better

⁴ For fat content lesser value is better

BEST BUY

Top Ramen Atta Noodles gets the highest overall score (70). If price is also considered, Maggi 2 Minutes Noodles obtained the best rank as it is reasonably priced (Rs. 16/100g) and also has a lower fat and salt content compared to Wai-Wai Ready to Eat Noodles which is at the same rank. Our best buy among the 9 brands of Instant Noodles is Maggi 2 Minutes Noodles

MANUFACTURERS RESPONSES

As a policy, we convey the test results to all the manufacturers, irrespective of whether their brands have passed or failed. The results are sent to them. All the manufacturers receive the results of their own products only and are given two weeks from the date of receipt to respond.

None of the manufacturers have responded till the time of going to press.

Table 2 - PERFORMANCE OF BRANDS OVER THE YEARS							
Sr. No.	Brand Name	Fat Content (g/100g)			Sodium (mg/100g)		
		2012	2014	2019	2012	2014	2019
1	Maggi 2 Minutes Noodles	14.7	11.55	15.6	821.0	675.75	1198
2	Maggi Nutri-licious Atta Noodles	17.0	12	14.2	1031.0	831	1093
3	Knorr Soupy Noodles	14.8	12.6	17.6	1943.0	1506	1897
4	Ching's Secret Schezwan Instant Noodles	17.3	-	15.8	1210.0	-	1745
5	Sunfeast Yippee! Noodles	18.3	14.48	21.2	1152.0	753.75	1099
6	Reliance Select Instant Noodles*	17.4	12.68	16.1	1008.0	1118.25	1200

* We tested New Reliance Select Instant Noodles in 2012 and 2014, while in 2019 the brand tested was Reliance Select Instant Noodles

- Fat and sodium content reduced in *Maggi 2 Minutes Noodles*, *Maggi Nutri-licious Atta Noodles*, *Knorr Soupy Noodles* and *Sunfeast Yippee! Noodles* from 2012 to 2014. However, both parameters showed increase when tested in 2019.
- For *Ching's Secret Schezwan Instant Noodles*, fat content decreased in 2019 as compared to 2012 whereas sodium showed increase in the same period.
- Fat content in *Reliance Select Instant Noodles* decreased in 2014 and increased again in 2019 whereas sodium consistently showed an increase from 2012 to 2019

AREAS OF ACTION

CERC will be sending representations to the regulatory authorities for taking the following actions:

- FSSAI will be requested to urgently set limits of fat and sodium, taking into account our country's dietary traditions and tropical climate. Also request them to make the labelling requirements for the declaration of the fat and sodium content in instant noodles more specific and elaborate and to be prominently displayed on the packet.

- Manufacturers should make a conscious effort to reduce the level of sodium in instant noodles and increase the amount of elements such as calcium and iron to maximise the nutritional benefits. They need to take up responsibility to reformulate products and invest in better, healthier versions. The process could be gradual to ensure the consumer is accustomed to the altered taste over time and not suddenly.
- The Advertising Standards Council of India (ASCI) should seriously focus on advertisements and promotions of noodles addressed to children, and also on celebrities endorsing Noodles as healthy snack/breakfast.
- Efforts to be made towards education and awareness of consumers regarding health impact of Noodles

TIPS FOR CONSUMERS

- Combine an instant noodles meal with vegetables and fruits, either as garnishing or as an accompaniment.
- The protein value of instant noodles meals can be increased by adding peas/pulses (e.g., boiled chana etc), eggs or soy products such as tofu or soya nuggets etc.
- Majority of salt is added to the noodles through the seasoning supplied in sachets. To reduce the sodium content, try to use the minimum amount of seasoning (preferably half of the sachet) while preparing instant noodles.
- Instant noodle soup is often high in salt, so intake of excessive amount of sodium can be limited by avoiding its consumption. It should not be taken as a replacement of the main meals.



GRAHAK SATHI'S CONCLUSION

The test results clearly indicate that Instant noodles are high in sodium and therefore cannot be considered a healthy food. Do not be lured by the tall claims about their goodness made in the advertisements. Such packaged foods should only be consumed occasionally.

Source : Grahak Sathi Vol.5No.3 2019