

**I love Instant Soups but They  
are Bad for My Health!**



# CERC reveals how unhealthy Instant Soups are

## Tests show that salt and sugar levels have risen over the years

Do you think a packet of tasty, easy to prepare instant soup is a healthy option for a snack or a meal? You couldn't be more wrong. Grahak Sathi (June-July 2017), the National Consumer Magazine in Hindi published by Consumer Education and Research Centre (CERC), Ahmedabad released findings of its in-house comparative product testing laboratory on nine brands of instant soup. Shockingly, the findings revealed that many brands had high salt (sodium) and sugar content.



## Brands Tested

- **Mixed Veg.**
  - Knorr Classic Mixed Veg. Soup
  - Reliance Healthy Italian Veg.
  - Ching's Secret Mix Veg. Instant
- **Tomato**
  - Reliance Healthy Life Farm Tomato
  - Knorr Classic Thick Tomato Soup
  - Ching's Secret Tomato Instant Soup
- **Sweet Corn Veg.**
  - Reliance Healthy Life Golden Sweet Corn
  - Knorr Chinese Sweet Corn Veg. Soup
  - Ching's Secret Sweet Corn Veg. Instant



## No improvement

We tested packaged soups in 2010 and 2013 as well. There seems to be no improvement with respect to formulation over the last seven years. In fact, as can be seen from the table below, the salt (sodium) and sugar levels have risen. It should be noted that CERC tested for sodium, the component of salt that can have adverse health implications.

Year report was Published	No. of brands tested	Sodium content (mg/100g)		Sugar content (g/100g)	
		Min.	Max.	Min.	Max.
2010	11	1203	7037	0.7	25.9
2013	6	3417	3937	14.4	23.4
2017	9	3948	5244	16.2	43.2

## Key findings

### Mixed vegetable soup

**Ching's** had the highest amount of sodium per serving (787 mg) followed by **Reliance** and **Knorr**. **Ching's** also had the highest amount of sugar per serving (3.5 g) followed by **Reliance** and **Knorr**. (See Annexure for details).

### Tomato soup

**Reliance** had the highest amount of sodium per serving (696 mg) followed by **Ching's** and **Knorr**. **Ching's** had the highest amount of sugar per serving (6.48 g) followed by **Knorr** and **Reliance**.

### Sweet corn soup

**Ching's** had the highest amount of sodium per serving (659 mg) followed by **Knorr** and **Reliance**. **Ching's** also had the highest amount of sugar per serving (4.1 g) followed by **Knorr** and **Reliance**.

## Test Results

Brand	Rank	Total Score <sup>1</sup>	Price 100gm (Rs.) <sup>2</sup>	Sodium (Salt) Content (mg/serving) <sup>3</sup>		Sugar Content (g/serving) <sup>4</sup>	
				Tasted Range	According to Labeling	Tasted Range	According to Labeling
<b>Mixed Veg.</b>							
Knorr Classic Mixed Vegetable Soup	1	100	11	455.0	472	2.10	2.1
Reliance Healthy Italian Veg	2	74	75	592.2	NM <sup>5</sup>	2.94	2.4
Ching's Secret Mix Veg Instant	3	59	83	787.0	860	3.50	4.0
<b>Tomato</b>							
Reliance Healthy Life Farm Tomato	1	88	75	696.0	NM	3.30	3.0
Knorr Classic Thick Tomato Soup	2	84	94	534.8	533.8	4.82	4.73
Ching's Secret Tomato Instant Soup	3	66	83	659.4	910	6.48	7.0
<b>Sweet Corn Veg.</b>							
Reliance Healthy Life Golden Sweet Corn	1	100	83	476.8	NM	1.70	1.6
Knorr Chinese Sweet Corn Veg Soup	2	80	114	539.0	543	2.40	2.5
Ching's Secret Sweet Corn Veg Instant	3	57	105	659.0	858.8	4.10	5.9
<b>Weightages</b>				50%		50%	

**Note:**

<sup>1</sup> Overall score has counted on the basis of minimum weightage as - Sodium content-50% and Sugar Content 50%

<sup>2</sup> Price/100g is counted on MRP and

<sup>3</sup> and <sup>4</sup> lower range of salt and sugar is good for health. Salt and sugar level are measured per serving.

<sup>5</sup> NM- Not Mentioned

**Alarming facts**

The Recommended Daily Allowance (RDA) is a maximum of 2400mg of sodium. At 659 mg, one serving of **Ching's Secret Mix Veg Instant Soup** contains nearly one-third the RDA! The Food Standard Agency (FSA) of UK has set a target of an average 600 mg in a single serving of soup for manufacturers. By this guideline, four of the nine brands exceed the limit.



The RDA for sugar as per the latest norms of the World Health Organization (WHO) is 25g (six teaspoons). At 4.1 g, one serving **Ching's Secret Tomato Instant** contains more than 25% of the RDA!

**Health Implications**

Excess sodium is bad for health as it can cause high blood pressure which triples the risk of heart disease and stroke. Sugar is the leading contributor to obesity and increases the risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer.

**Side effects of some ingredients**

Packaged soups may contain:

- Thickening agents like corn flour and maltodextrin – Corn flour increases blood sugar and leads to fat deposition. Maltodextrin can cause weight gain and flatulence.
- Colouring agents (masked as flavour enhancers) – Some are toxic and damage the kidneys and liver.
- Yeast extract – It increases the bad bacteria in the body and causes acidic conditions.
- MSG (monosodium glutamate) – It is known to trigger headaches, rapid heart rate, and chest pain and cause nausea.
- Sulphites – This preservative can cause rashes and itching, restricted breathing and even asthmatic attacks.

Sources: Mumbai Mirror, [www.practo.com](http://www.practo.com), [www.livestrong.com](http://www.livestrong.com)

**Tips for Consumers**

- Mix fresh vegetables, beans, pluses in soup to make more nutritious
- For high salted soup brands, use less amount of instant soup mixture for making soup
- Read the labels carefully, who are sensitive for preservatives/ additives
- If you are MSG sensitive, check the labels. It may be written as INS 621.



## Manufacturer's response

The results are shared on the basis of mg/100g of the product (for sodium) and g/100g of the product (for sugar) with the manufacturers. They responded asking CERC to send them the results based on serving size, which they did. Subsequently, there was no response from them till the time of going to press.

## Best buys

CERC's Best Buys in the three categories were decided on the basis of Overall Score and Price. In the mixed veg. soup category, Knorr Classic Mixed Veg. Soup is the best buy. Though it is much costlier than the other two brands, it is way ahead in the score. In the other two categories, the Reliance variants – Reliance Healthy Life Farm Tomato and Reliance Healthy Life Golden Sweet Corn are the best buys as they score better and are also less in price.



## Urgent action needed

Manufacturers should make a conscious effort to reduce the level of sodium and sugar in soups. To make it easy for consumers to understand, manufacturers should have a uniform serving size.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India should ensure that manufacturers give nutritional information on the label as per a standard format.

Take Action Now!

## Grahak Sathi's conclusion

Affordable and cleverly marketed, instant soups are becoming increasingly popular in urban India. Consumers are made to believe that they are healthy and nutritious. In reality, though they may be low in fat, they are loaded with salt and sugar making them anything but a healthy choice.

**Source:** Grahak Sathi, Volume 3, No. 1 June – July 2017