Instant noodles

They may be a quick snack but are they a healthy one? We taste a sample of what is available in the line of instant noodles and take a closer look at the labels.

Instant noodles have their origins in Japan but they are popular the world over because they are an inexpensive, easy to prepare snack. Instant noodles are noodles that have been dried or precooked with oil. They are sold with a sachet of powdered flavouring and sometimes a sachet of soy sauce is also included with the main product. Dried noodles usually come in a packet and must be cooked or soaked in boiling water for 2 to 5 minutes before the flavouring is added, at which point they are ready to be served. Precooked noodles often come in a plastic pot into which boiling water is added and left to stand for a few minutes. The flavouring is then added and the contents can be eaten straight from the container.

Nutritional content

Instant noodles and the sachet of flavouring accompanying them usually contain high amounts of sodium flavourings and some contain the flavour enhancer monosodium glutamate which may cause problems for consumers with food sensitivities.

We took a look at the fat, saturated fat and the sodium content per 100g of the five products that were tasted. However, it is important to acknowledge that people normally eat a whole pack of instant noodles in one sitting regardless of the portion size. This means that the energy, fat, saturated fat and sodium intake is likely to be a lot higher than the values per 100g. Therefore, we also noted the nutritional information. In the case of Lidl’s King Li Instant Noodles Chicken Flavour there was no indication of the values for 100g or even how much the product weighs in total when cooked. The saturated fat content was also missing from the label.

We contacted Lidl and pointed out that the labelling is quite confusing as it does not always indicate whether values are for the cooked or the dry product and what the actual pack size is when cooked. Lidl responded and said that the packaging is currently being altered to include detailed nutritional information. We hope these changes are implemented without delay.

Our findings

We used the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA) nutritional criteria for traffic light signpost labelling in our table to indicate whether fats, saturated fats and salt are low, medium or high per 100g of the instant noodle products we examined. The ‘traffic light’ labelling system uses single red, amber or green traffic light symbols on the front of the pack to show at a glance if the food has high, medium or low amounts with red being the least healthy choice and green the most healthy. A food can display multiple traffic lights; if the food is high in fat, a red light is displayed for this nutrient, and if the same food is low in sugar, a green light is displayed to convey this. Any product with more than 1.5g of salt per 100g puts you in the red zone. Over 5g per 100g of saturated fat is considered high while any product with over 20g per 100g of fat is considered high in fat.

We found that the values were amber (medium) for each product for fat, saturated fat and salt content. However, if the full pack or pot of noodles is consumed in one sitting, the amount of fat, saturated fat and salt you consume will be high. The following are the upper limits for daily intake of energy (calories), fat, saturated fat and salt for adults (men and women) and children:

- Energy (calories): 2000kcal (adults) 2500kcal (men) 2000kcal (women) 1800kcal (children 5 – 10 years)
- Fat: 70g (adults) 95g (men) 70g (women) 70g (children 5 – 10 years)
- Of which is saturated fat: 20g (adults) 30g (men) 20g (women) 20g (children 5 – 10 years)
- Salt: 6g (adults) 6g (men) 6g (women) 4g (children 5 – 10 years)

These values indicate that eating one packet or pot of instant noodles could contribute significantly to your guideline daily amount of certain nutrients. A packet of McDonnell’s Super Noodles Chicken Flavour has 3g of salt which is...
Eating foods which are high in unhealthy saturated fats and salt can lead to health problems such as high cholesterol and heart disease. When consumed in full, all of the instant noodle products in our taste test contribute quite a significant amount of fat, saturated fat and sodium to the diet. We would like to see the manufacturers reformulating these products in order to make the products a more acceptable snack in terms of nutrition. Until this happens, we wouldn’t recommend that consumers eat instant noodles regularly as the nutritional benefits are minimal. If you do eat them, you could omit the salt sachet as this contains a lot of salt and add alternatives such as pepper, garlic, herbs, and herbal salt.

### Choice comment

McDonnells Super Noodles Chicken Flavour

**Score:** 4/5

**Verdict:** These were by far the most popular instant noodles in our taste test. They received an average of four out of five marks. One tester said they were ‘by far the most edible of all the products’.

King Li Instant Noodles Chicken Flavour (Lidl)

**Score:** 1.5/5

**Verdict:** This product did not go down very well with our testers and received a low score. The initial comments on appearance and smell were positive but went downhill after that. One tester said the noodles were tasteless and soggy. Another compared the dish to ‘mushy noodles in a beef stock cube broth’.

### Nutritional criteria 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Price (€)</th>
<th>Energy (kcal/100g)</th>
<th>Energy (kcal per pack)</th>
<th>Fat (g) per 100g</th>
<th>Fat (g) per pack</th>
<th>Saturated fat (g) per 100g</th>
<th>Saturated fat (g) per pack</th>
<th>Salt (g) per 100g</th>
<th>Salt (g) per pack</th>
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