

Pizza Perfect: A nutritional overhaul of 'junk food' and ready-meals is possible

October 31 2013

Pizza is widely regarded as a fully-paid up member of the junk food gang – maybe even the leader – at least the versions found on supermarket shelves or delivered to your door by scooter.

Historically, a few humble ingredients: bread, tomatoes and a little cheese, combined to form a traditional, healthy meal, but many of today's pizzas have recruited two dangerous new members to their posse – salt and [saturated fat](#).

However, pizzas and many other nutritionally-dubious foods can be made nutritionally ideal: A crowning example of 'health by stealth' according to scientists, who say it is possible to reformulate such foods to achieve public health goals, without upsetting their taste so they remain commercially successful for producers.

Professor Mike Lean, a physician and nutritionist in the School of Medicine at the University of Glasgow, said: "Traditional [pizza](#) should be a low-fat meal containing at least one portion of vegetables, so mainly made from ingredients associated with better [cardiovascular health](#).

"However, to enhance shelf-life, commercial pizza recipes today include much more fat and salt than desirable. Until now, nobody has stopped to notice that many essential vitamins and minerals are very low or even completely absent. From a nutrition and health perspective, they are hazardous junk.

"Pizzas are widely consumed and regarded as meals in themselves, and yet their impact on human nutrition does not seem to have been studied."

The team of scientists, which also included Dr Emilie Combet, Amandine Jarlot and Kofi Aidoo of Glasgow Caledonian University, set out to ascertain the nutritional content and quality of contemporary pizzas and to demonstrate that pizza can be reformulated to make it the basis of a fully nutritionally-balanced meal.

Working with Donnie Maclean of food producer EatBalanced.com, a range of new pizza recipes was then developed, each containing 30% of all the nutrients required in a day: in other words, an ideal meal.

A total of 25 Margarita pizzas were analysed. They varied widely in calorie content, ranging from 200 to 562kcal. Few approached the 600kcal energy requirement that would make it a proper meal, so people may tend to eat something extra.

Perhaps surprisingly only six of 25 pizzas tested contained too much total fat (>35% total energy), with eight having too much saturated fat while only two boasting a desirable level (

Citation: Pizza Perfect: A nutritional overhaul of 'junk food' and ready-meals is possible (2013, October 31) retrieved 21 September 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-10-pizza-nutritional-overhaul-junk-food.html>

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