

Popular TV chef recipes 'less healthy' than supermarket ready meals

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Recipes created by popular television chefs contain significantly more energy, protein, fat, and saturated fat and less fibre per portion than supermarket ready meals, finds a study in the Christmas issue published on *BMJ* website today.

The authors suggest including nutritional information on [recipes](#) in cookery books. Consideration should also be given to regulation of the recipes demonstrated by television chefs similar to that limiting advertisement of foods classified as high in fat, salt, or sugar, they add.

By 2020, it is estimated that over 70% of adult in the United Kingdom and the United States will be overweight, boosting rates of diabetes, heart disease and cancer. Previous studies suggest that both supermarket ready meals and television chef recipes influence many peoples' diets, but no study has comprehensively examined the nutritional content of either.

So, a team of researchers based at NHS Tees and Newcastle University analysed the nutritional content of television chef recipes with own brand supermarket ready meals. They then compared both types of meals to dietary guidelines published by the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) and the UK Food Standards Agency (FSA).

They randomly selected 100 main meal recipes from five bestselling cookery books by UK television chefs and 100 own brand ready meals from the three leading UK supermarkets.

Recipes were included from 30 Minute Meals by Jamie Oliver, Baking Made Easy by Lorraine Pascale, Ministry of Food by Jamie Oliver, Kitchen by Nigella Lawson, and River Cottage Everyday by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. Own brand ready meals were from [Asda](#), Sainsbury's and Tesco.

[Nutritional content](#) was calculated from the raw ingredients stated in the recipes and ready meals.

No recipe or ready meal fully complied with the WHO recommendations for the avoidance of diet related diseases. Both types of meals tended to be high in protein, fat, saturated fat, and salt, low in carbohydrate, and within the recommended range for sugar.

Meals based on television chef recipes were less healthy than ready meals, as they contained significantly more energy, protein, fat, and saturated fat and significantly less fibre per portion than ready meals. The recipes were also more likely to achieve "red traffic light" labels according to FSA criteria than ready meals.

Despite reported efforts from industry to reduce the salt content of prepared meals, only 4% of the ready meals met the WHO recommendation. The recipes were more likely to comply with the recommendation, although the authors point out that salt used for seasoning was not assessed.

"This study shows that neither recipes created by popular television chefs nor ready meals produced by three leading UK supermarket chains meet national or international nutritional standards for a balanced diet," say the authors. "The recipes seemed to be less healthy than the ready meals on several metrics," they add.

They say that maximum nutritional benefit "is likely to be derived from home cooking of nutritionally balanced recipes primarily using raw ingredients, rather than relying on ready meals or recipes by television chefs."

And they conclude: "Further reformulation of ready meals in line with international nutritional guidelines, and collaboration with television chefs to improve the nutritional quality of their recipes, may also help consumers to achieve a balanced diet."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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